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HANS BELLMER
&
THE EXPERIENCE
OF
VIOLENCE

Dina A. El-Sioufi

Doctoral Thesis submitted for examination of
Ph.D.

at

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

November 2005

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HANS BELLMER & THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

Abstract

This dissertation is largely an analysis of Hans Bellmer's work and an investigation of aspects of violence. Violence in Bellmer's work opens up a space for some comparison with other forms of violence expressed through theory, literature, art.

My dissertation is made up of two parts. Part One: *Hans Bellmer* consists of two chapters. The first chapter contains a discussion of nineteenth-century German works centred on the figure of the automaton. Nineteenth-century automata influenced Bellmer and constitute one form of violence, Bellmer's dolls constitute another, as I show. In chapter two I concentrate on Bellmer's perverse images of his dolls. I base my analysis of Bellmer's perverse doll-images mainly on Gilles Deleuze's definition of sadism and masochism, on Bellmer's writings, on Jacques Lacan's concept of *le corps morcelé*, including images of Bellmer's last partner Unica Zürn.

Part Two: *The Experience of Violence* is made up of one chapter. There I discuss Bellmer's dolls as a particular figuration of the feminine analysed through Walter Benjamin's ideas of *le corps-femme de la modernité*. I then link Bellmer's *corps-femme* with those in Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and Otto Dix's paintings via Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. From there I go onto a discussion of the concepts that visually and literally constitute violence in Bellmer such as fragmentation, traces, time, memory through the work of Claudio Parmiggiani, and other Benjaminian ideas. Parmiggiani explores the effects of these concepts in his work exposing them as part of the artwork; as its objects.

I conclude that the violence in Bellmer's work is about pain and takes the form of masochism. I also conclude that violence takes on different forms, one form of which is thinking and memory, another is the analysis and interpretation of artworks.

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INTRODUCTION

There are three aims here. One aim is to analyse Bellmer's visual work from different perspectives. The second aim is to link Bellmer's visual work to other works and ideas: literature, philosophy, psychology, art, as well as to his writings. The third aim is to look at certain concepts responsible for the visual appearance of an experience of violence in Bellmer's work and analyse a selection of artworks that contain these concepts as their objects. (Fragmentation, distortion are examples.)

Bellmer's work is very disturbing, perverse, and is the result of a combination of more than one experience of violence. There the experience of violence can be read as social, psychological, sexual, physical, emotional. Discussing these requires linking Bellmer's work to and analysing it through other works and ideas. This gives rise to another experience of violence. This other experience of violence results from choosing to analyse and interpret Bellmer's work through specific texts and works forcing his work to be seen from certain perspectives at the expense of others. In other words, this experience takes place through interpretation as a form of limitation and exclusion which is one form of violence.¹ At the same time the works chosen here all have some common thread with Bellmer's work and therefore contain types of violence. Apart from the need to find interpretations for Bellmer's work, the other main reason for linking his work to other works and ideas is in order to demonstrate that violence is not necessarily only visual, psychological, or physical; violence can turn up under less obvious guises such as quotation, memory, time, traces. These different forms of violence, obvious and less obvious, are also what I investigate here.

My dissertation is made up of three chapters. The first two are centred mainly

on Bellmer's dolls. Bellmer's work is about creating dolls. It is also about deconstructing, deforming, manipulating and staging their bodies. The fact that Bellmer's work revolves around the body; that Bellmer is obsessed by a certain type of body : dolls, makes his work – irrespective of its violence – very fascinating. This is because of the space the dolls' bodies open up for an investigation of all sorts of knowledge.

Bellmer's dolls are a type of effigy. Therefore, one space Bellmer's dolls open up links back to, and proceeds from an archaic and recent past based upon the history of effigies and effigy-making. Effigies were and will always continue to be made, as sacred idols, as valuable monuments or decorative pieces, as magical objects, as waxworks, as sexual fetishes, as scientific robots, as dolls. They contain reflections of man's image, faith, fantasies, ambitions, perversions, technological advances. Seen from this perspective, Bellmer's dolls carry traces of a prehistory and of a recent history. However, they also embody and represent a moment in the continuity of history which also means that they point to a post-history.² That is, effigies do not stop with Bellmer's dolls, they continue from there transformed into new representations of the body, as well as of effigies. However, in my search for a post-history for, and in connection with Bellmer's dolls I do not look at the transformation of dolls and effigies into new forms during and after Bellmer. For this purpose I choose to consider certain concepts that are behind the creation of Bellmer's dolls and express forms of violence as the dolls' post-history. These concepts are communicated through the dolls' bodies and take on forms such as fragmentation, deformation, additions and permutations, past traces, memory, ruin. I therefore look at artworks that use some of these concepts as their objects in different ways, and consider these as the post-history of the experience(s) of violence communicated through Bellmer's dolls. It is not only representations of the body that develop into new forms with and after Bellmer, but also the ideas behind his dolls' disturbing creation and structures take on other forms. I therefore choose to discuss

artworks where the experience of violence is expressed and developed in other ways and consider these as the post-history for the visual experience of violence in Bellmer's dolls. My main reason for this is to provide a contrast between an experience of violence that is projected onto and communicated through the body, and one that is transferred from the body onto man's surroundings, and everyday objects. The difference between these is that former decentralises and fragments the subject but does not entirely do away with it since it still expresses identity through some (physical) deformation that represents an alterity, whereas the latter disperses and dissolves the subject and what one is left with are traces of absence, of the existence of what no longer exists.

In chapter one I compare and contrast Bellmer's dolls with past works that contain some sort of effigy and were known to have influenced his dolls. I therefore give a sketchy outline of the history of automata in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German literature and theatre. I concentrate on Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810, *On the Marionette Theatre*) and Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881). These works are known to have had some influence on Bellmer and his doll beginnings. I tentatively, if not quite clumsily, link these with some philosophical ideas related to their period in order to show how two disciplines of some intellectual and structural difference such as literature and philosophy can be brought together. One reason is that this provides an example for a recurring pattern in my analysis of artworks and my linking them to different theoretical ideas in the two chapters that follow. Another reason for looking at these works is to investigate their dependance upon the philosophical notion of being; that is, to look at and compare the position of the subject in such narratives. As I conclude there is a confusion in the status of the subject that starts taking place in these nineteenth-century narratives and points to a slow moving away from the philosophical notion of absolute being to one of a becoming. That is, there begins a decentralisation of the subject accompanied with its increasing reification and

alienation. These aspects advance in the first half of the twentieth-century towards a partial dissolution of the subject through its fragmentation and/or distortion. Bellmer's work is one example of this. However the subject and its (relation to) history are not completely dissolved in Bellmer; they exist fragmented and splintered. This opens up a space for a plurality of interpretations some of which I introduce in this chapter and engage with in my whole dissertation, none of which can be taken as conclusive, or exclusive.

For example, another type of knowledge Bellmer's dolls open up stems from their being personal objects. They embody Bellmer's psyche, his alter-ego or feminine other, his feelings. As a result they need to be considered under a biographical and psychoanalytical light. Dolls are tightly linked to childhood, play, fantasy, and consequently to primal fantasies and memory. These are themes I engage with in my discussion. I briefly introduce psychoanalytical issues such as primal fantasies, explain their meanings, and analyse one of Bellmer's images: *La Poupée*, 1934, through these in chapter one. I also give a brief biography of Bellmer's childhood and adolescence leading up to the production of his first dolls.

In chapter two I return to and develop the discussion of psychoanalysis and primal fantasies introduced in chapter one. In particular I look at the third primal fantasy, the castration fantasy which is a central issue there. My discussion of the castration fantasy raises issues in connection with it that are considered to be perversions or sexual aberrations (in Freud's words). These issues include fetishism and its origins, sadism and masochism. I discuss these psychoanalytical perversions and base my discussion mainly on Gilles Deleuze's study *Le froid et le cruel. Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* (1967). I also engage somewhat laconically with Sigmund Freud's writings on sexuality. Deleuze's study is based upon an analysis of literature, and not on clinical cases, which is my reason for largely (not completely) choosing his work over Freud's in my analysis of Bellmer's staged doll-images. (Deleuze often refers to Freud, even if

in polemical terms.) I then go on to argue that Bellmer's images read through Deleuze, rather than just in terms of Freud and psychoanalysis, become a representation of masochism as opposed to sadism – as some writers on Bellmer have maintained. (Rosalind Krauss, Sue Taylor are examples).

In chapter two I continue my analysis of Bellmer's work through a discussion of his writings. I link Bellmer's broken dolls to Jacques Lacan's ideas on psychological aggression that takes place through what he calls *le corps morcelé*. I also discuss Lacan's imaginary, alienating, and symbolic identification along with Freud's ideas on narcissism. I argue that narcissism, through Freud, is a key factor in defining Bellmer's relation to his dolls and last partner: Unica Zürn, and as a result, in defining the type of perversion that constitutes his doll-stagings and images of Zürn. That is, whether Bellmer's images are masochistic or sadistic as defined by Deleuze. I follow this discussion and look at Bellmer's and Zürn's relation. I explore aspects of her personality expressed through her writings and Bellmer's images of and comments about her. Zürn's personality and lethargic appearance were key factors in Bellmer's desiring her as his partner and human doll-muse. In addition I concentrate on aspects of Bellmer's doll and Zürn that show morbidity in his work and his need to depict a self-inflicting, systematic, and repetitive experience of violence in his art. All this does not lead to an appeasement or solution for the turmoil and troubled inner state that is expressed in his work. Consequently, I conclude there that it is not appeasement that Bellmer seeks but an all too human albeit perverse pleasure in obsessively reliving pain.

Bellmer's main artwork is his doll, a figuration of the feminine that is very much an altered representation of a male artist's identity and an important part of his life. In spite of Bellmer's wide readings his art concentrates on the experience of sexuality, in particular on erotic perversion, expressed through the body of the dolls he constructs, and later on through Zürn whose body he treats as an inert doll-object. This makes Bellmer's art belong to a world that is obsessed by

the body and uses it to express identity, alterity, psychological states, social conditions, above all as a sexual unconscious (to use Deleuze's term) made visible and brought onto the surface of the body. The psychoanalytical space Bellmer's dolls open up can be read as the artist's personal narrative poured into his work; that is, as the subjective fiction that leads to certain interpretations that are nevertheless incomplete. These are incomplete because Bellmer's dolls are not only personal; they are artworks demanding to be seen and analysed as part of an ongoing art historical discourse centred on the body that is also time-specific. In other words, Bellmer's dolls are objects of history that are also interruptions in history's continuity, they are frozen moments and monads. This opens up another space for knowledge that stems from a need to interpret Bellmer's dolls as artworks, as historical moments, by analysing their structure and taking into account the materials used. I touch on the materials Bellmer uses in his visual work very briefly – for lack of space – going onto the dolls' actual structure as image. As art objects Bellmer's dolls are emblems of childhood, but they also are representations of the female body whose structures have gone terribly wrong. In this respect Bellmer's dolls are modern figurations of the feminine that I see as a historical continuity and as frozen interruptions of history, as well as representations of a collective and human condition.

In chapter three I therefore investigate Bellmer's perverse doll-bodies and stagings as representations of *le corps-femme de la modernité*,³ giving further interpretation to them. Christine Buci-Glucksmann uses the term of *le corps-femme de la modernité* in connection with Benjamin's writings about femininity in modern-day Paris and his analysis of Charles Baudelaire. In order to introduce Benjamin's concept of *le corps-femme* as modern tragic drama (*Trauerspiel*) and analyse Bellmer's dolls through it, I start part one (of three parts) of chapter three with some preliminary considerations of Benjamin's ideas. Benjamin's ideas on redemption, on traces, on the existence of the past in artworks that turns these into dialectical images read from his 1935-*Paris Exposé* and other

writings lead to his ideas on *le corps-femme de la modernité*. I also include Benjamin's friend, the philosopher, Theodor Adorno's comments on these ideas. Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas provide invaluable insights into modern city-life and the feminine-figures it produces as a window on social conditions. From there I go onto a discussion of concepts such as traces, memory, the integrated experience and the flash experience, as well as the loss of aura and of tradition based on Benjamin's and Adorno's writings.

In part two of chapter three I take these ideas further and look at figurations of the feminine that I consider as possible representations for them. Hoffmann's Olympia, adapted in Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, is one example of the feminine that I analyse at some length. Both Hoffmann's work and Offenbach's operatic adaptation held a fascination for Benjamin, for Adorno, as well as for Bellmer. I continue my analysis of other female figures in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* seen as representations of social conditions and as *Trauerspiel*. I then compare Bellmer's dolls briefly with these, as well as with the female figures painted by a near contemporary of Bellmer, the German artist Otto Dix.

In the third part of chapter three I discuss works that I consider as the post-history for the violence Bellmer's dolls exude. By post-history I mean works that illustrate a dissolution of history and man's relation to it; that is, a space where there are only traces of the existence of the subject, of the body; where past, present and future coexist and time is seen as an eternal ephemerality.⁴ For this purpose I do not turn to the effigy-theme nor to figurations of the feminine, but to specific concepts behind Bellmer's dolls such as fragmentation, quotation from the past, the incorporeal event (to use Deleuze's expression) that produces a disappearance of chronological time.⁵ Bellmer's dolls are effigies and representations of the feminine whose structure depends on fragmentation, and on a simultaneous implosion-explosion with the body becoming an expression of what is happening inside it (through the incorporeal event). In other words, Bellmer expresses the effects of the experience of violence happening all at once

through physical form; through his doll-deformations. This results in images that only partially do away with the subject through a fragmented, distorted representation of the body (but still represent some definition of the subject) and compress the chronology of their narrative to a near disintegration of chronology (which is still an expression of the progress of time but as decline). Therefore, the works I choose as a post-history and as a contrast to Bellmer's body include fragmentation, non-chronology or timelessness, as their objects in the sense of a dissolution of the subject, of time and of the sense of history. The artist whose works I choose from for this post-history is Claudio Parmiggiani.

Parmiggiani's work portrays many of these concepts using contradictory objects that can be considered as poetic projections of some dream-landscape and of the imagination turned real. Parmiggiani's work sometimes involves bodily fragments but only as symbols of the senses (a dislocated ear means hearing, it also means dissonance) or as antique relics of history whose historical context is transformed into a present-history that embodies the dissolution of history in terms of the progress of time as eternal ephemerality. Such fragments are meant to suspend the body by interrupting its wholeness and substituting the part for the whole as dispersed traces of (non-)existence. In choosing works by Parmiggiani, I choose works that do away with the body, with Benjamin's *corps-femme*, and engage with what lies beyond the body and transcends it.

Bellmer and Parmiggiani are artists. There is no real nor obvious connection between their work and none that has been done before (to the best of my knowledge.) In chapter three I decide to make two connections between them. One connection is through the experience of violence. This connection arises from the effects of violence seen through a concrete body in Bellmer's case, even though it is disfigured and in ruins, and the effects of violence seen through Parmiggiani's dispersed objects, body metonyms, the traces of time, that stem from the ruins of history, from memory and from thinking the past as a contemporary event. This connection is an abstract one since most artworks can

be seen in terms of some experience of violence (and any such connections can easily be made). But it is my choice and is based upon the concept of the progress of history as decline in art that ends in its dissolution; that is, (a writing of) historical progress as violence. The other connection I make between these two artists is through Benjamin. Through this connection I show the divide between Bellmer and Parmiggiani and their diversity. Benjamin's thinking consists of two strands. One strand is materialist, dialectical and includes *le corps-femme de la modernité*. The other strand is non-materialist, and theological. This strand encompasses Benjamin's spiritual side of redemption and his concept of the Angel of History. Benjamin sees the realm of the Angel of History as that of the interruption of history, of catastrophe, of the loss of subjectivity. Several of these ideas were largely inspired by Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1920) which Benjamin bought in 1921 and considered as his most prized possession. In the second part of chapter three I relate Benjamin's *le corps-femme de la modernité* to Bellmer's dolls. In the third part of the chapter I relate Parmiggiani's work to Benjamin's spiritual strand.

Parmiggiani is one of the contemporary artists in whose work I see many open Benjaminian references, and correspondences between a nostalgia for the timeless and ephemeral, between the archaic and contemporary. Parmiggiani uses concepts and issues such as time, memory, the angelic, the archaic in the new, profane illumination, traces, and explores them through his work by exposing them as objects that are part of the artwork. I also constantly discuss the works I choose by Parmiggiani through his writings. Furthermore, Parmiggiani's work provides the alternative *angelic* or spiritual world to that of the *le corps-femme de la modernité* as depicted by Hoffmann, Dix, and Bellmer. It also enables me to provide a post-history for Bellmer's experience of violence.

I conclude this dissertation with what I set out to demonstrate in my discussion of Bellmer's work and the other works here: art is an experience of violence that encompasses and engenders other forms of violence. Analysis and

intepretation are also forms of violence. The texts and artworks that I engage with illustrate different experiences of violence. As I explained at the beginning of this introduction – and will discuss throughout this dissertation – there are many forms of violence, some of the utmost elegance and subtlety. Literature, poetry, art, architecture, are all objects of culture. Many of which are objects of extreme beauty, yet they have to be (and are) in Parmiggiani's words subversive acts of violence. 'Une œuvre doit être violente. Elle doit être comme un coup du poing à l'estomac. Silencieuse mais dure, dure mais silencieuse, comme un feu sous la cendre, obscure, grondante.'⁶ Works of art are subversive acts equivalent to screaming because they impose themselves as object-interventions in the natural world, they impose themselves on man's mind and vision, they force thinking, they enchant, they disturb, they can persist in memory. 'Pour un artiste une œuvre est la seule façon de hurler.'⁷ Artworks represent societies. They can also transform the view one has of a given society, as well as a society's perception of itself. They produce cultural and intellectual hierarchies. Literature, poetry, art, also demand acts such as reading, studying, thinking, which according to Benjamin are all forms of profane illumination.⁸ These are all subversive and subtle forms of violence. However, literature, poetry, art, also form man's history and express the concept of history as continuity, as well as in terms progress and decline, catastrophe, ruin, and eventually lead up to works created to express the dissolution of the sense of history and man's precarious relation to it which without doubt is the most violent experience of all.

Notes

1. I need to point this out: in my analysis of art here I use different methods of interpretation, but there is no in-depth discussion of them.
2. I use the term post-history rather than after-history deliberately here. This is because by post-history I mean an after-history in Benjamin's sense of pointing to and anticipating a future, here seen through Bellmer's dolls, in terms of actual effigy-history and as a representation of the body in art, that is ongoing and continues after Bellmer. I also mean post-history in terms of the dissolution of history. That is, I look at the experience of violence in Bellmer's work as the beginning of a partial dissolution of the sense of history as progress that becomes a dissolution of history *tout court* manifest in the severing of the subject's relation to it, as well as the disappearance of tradition illustrated in many artworks from the 1950s onwards. See Gianni Vattimo, *La struttura delle rivoluzioni artistiche*, in *La fine della modernità* (Italy: Garzanti, 1999). ('The Structure of Artistic Revolutions' – my loose translation.)
3. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La Folie du voir. Une esthétique du virtuel* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p.67.
4. Claudio Parmiggiani, in *Claudio Parmiggiani*, (Montpellier: Actes Sud), p.28.
5. Incorporeal events are pure effects that produce real reactions in persons experiencing them according to Gilles Deleuze. For a full discussion of the meaning of incorporeal events see Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969). See also Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies. On Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2004).
6. Claudio Parmiggiani, *Spirito, Sangue, Stella*, édition bilingue, texte français établi par Anne et Michel Bresson-Lucas (Arles: Actes Sud), p.109.
7. Ibid., p.81.
8. Walter Benjamin, *Le Surréalisme*, in *Œuvres II* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p.131.

PART ONE

HANS BELLMER

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH OF THE PERVERSE BODY

In 1933-34 Hans Bellmer creates his first doll-sculpture. From there Bellmer goes on to create more dolls, dressing them up, fragmenting and staging them in strange perverse postures – often photographing them. Before and during the creation of his doll-sculptures, Bellmer continues to illustrate erotic literature, draw dolls and little girls, photograph female models erotically. In this chapter I look at two examples of Bellmer's first dolls. I will begin by discussing the cultural objects that Bellmer grew up with and are known to have been of aesthetic interest to him and influenced his doll-creations such as early nineteenth-century German literature. I concentrate on aspects relevant to Bellmer's dolls in Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionetten-theater* (1810, *On the Marionette Theater*), and in the adaptation of E.T.A Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816, *The Sandman*) for Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881). Bellmer's dolls can be regarded as a later development of the automata and puppets depicted in these works. I will also discuss some of the philosophical ideas behind these works that become modified and transformed in Bellmer's work into a new philosophy; that is, into the aesthetics and thinking of his time reflected in his dolls. The works I choose for my analysis in relation to Kleist's and Hoffmann's works are Bellmer's *La Poupée* (1935) and *La Mitrailieuse en état de grâce* (1937). I also briefly discuss Bellmer's c.1962 illustrations for Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*.

In addition I analyse Bellmer's *La Poupée* and *La Mitrailieuse en état de*

grâce from a psychological perspective in an attempt to reconstruct retrospectively emotional and psychoanalytical fantasies that I consider Bellmer communicates through his works. I then look at Bellmer's early years and the personal social conditions that might have a bearing on his doll-creations and on their fragmented and tragic appearance.

The Return of the Past

The idea of a past that returns disguised in an artwork, or any in other form of creativity, is described by Sigmund Freud as 'the return of the repressed'. What this means is that memories, events, experiences from the past that have been forgotten might suddenly reappear in another form. In other words, these can resurface masked through another reality and need to be recovered and reconstructed from their new forms. One reason for the past to return is an unexpected encounter with something or someone that triggers off an unconscious past memory. Another reason for the past to return is due to an individual's inability to absorb or deal with a traumatic event, memory, or experience at the time this occurs. The result is that such memories can resurface anytime later via an encounter, or object. Two more conditions need to be fulfilled in order to turn the repressed past into a Freudian symptom.¹ These are repetition and the uncanny. Repetition means that some motif, event, gesture, act, is repeated incessantly by the traumatised subject either on its own, or is recreated repeatedly within a work of art, literature, performance. The uncanny, on the other hand, involves an event, artwork, text, that combines elements of the animate and the inanimate. A moving statue, a speaking doll are examples. This type of past belongs to psychoanalytical theory. I discuss some of these aspects later on in this chapter, and follow with a more detailed analysis regarding Bellmer's dolls in my second chapter.

But there is also another past that resurfaces in artworks and creative works: a cultural past, a historical past, a primordial past. In this sense the ‘return of the repressed’ or simply repetition under different guises can also be regarded in terms of a collective historical psyche with artworks as one manifestation for this phenomenon. The purpose of my brief discussion of nineteenth-century German literature, among other past references in relation to Bellmer’s dolls is to underline the fact that his dolls are part of a continuing (art) history of effigy-making that takes from the past and rewrites it by modifying and adding to it, according to its own epoch. I also seek to establish that Bellmer’s dolls become the site for their epoch’s current philosophical ideas that include psychoanalysis with its primal fantasies.

The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is therefore, paradoxically: From the future. Symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but reconstructed retroactively – the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame, which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning. As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier’s network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.²

Slavoj Žižek underlines an obvious point: if the past returns it must do so later, at a future time. The impact a recurring event has, its uncanniness as a result of its being fixed at a certain moment in the past and exploding in another time-period; that is, its being inanimate (fixed in time) and animate (moves from the time it occurred to another later time), can only be discerned through analysis, and memory. In other words, symptoms take on meanings through a retroactive reconstruction of the past under the given action, behaviour, creative work they are masked, or narrated. Žižek states above that ‘the past is always

present' as 'historical tradition'. This is one reason for my investigating automata from literary works that come out of a German tradition with respect to Bellmer's dolls: objects that signal and confirm the beginnings of a destruction of tradition and its values based upon the centrality of the subject, on absolute convictions and ideals. Another reason is to show how this destruction of tradition develops through art objects such as Bellmer's dolls. That is, how Bellmer's dolls continue the tradition of effigy-narrative and of body representation, but as a deformation of tradition, as its fragmentation and perversion that open it to a plurality of new meanings.

The other point Žižek raises in connection with symptoms are traces. Traces take on different meanings. Here 'symptoms are meaningless traces' implies that without detecting and analysing traces elements such as the uncanny, repetition, and repression making up symptoms can have no meaning. Žižek's 'the analysis produces the truth' depends on the truth one is seeking. In the case of symptoms, any element of truth produced by analysis is largely about the artist's personal life and psyche projected through his work. As Žižek adds the interpretation of a symptom's traces changes with time because of the addition of events, the discovery of other elements, and their analysis from new perspectives.

Žižek's 'the past-that returns' as 'historical tradition' paves the way for my investigation of German Romantic literature in connection to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers in the coming sections. There I argue and show that traces of the German Romantic past exist in Bellmer's dolls. Bellmer's dolls have undergone an aesthetic and philosophical metamorphosis that represents a violence to tradition in the sense that there the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy related to German Romanticism has given way to André Breton's Surrealism, Georges Bataille's eroticism, and psychoanalysis.

Doll Beginnings and The Birth of the Perverse Body

As soon as man was capable of some form of graphic expression, he began to look for forms to represent an image of himself and his life. The Caves of Lascaux, painted Egyptian mummies, Greco-Roman portraits and statues, are a few B.C. examples. Christianity brought with it a different kind of statuary and image making: religious icons, images of saints, *Pietàs*. Each epoch, culture, and school of thought engenders its own image of man whether in writing or visually as artwork and craftsmanship.³ The Industrial Age adds technology – such as photography, motion pictures – to visual arts. Generally speaking it was possible to see in official image-making some direct purpose, such as the provision of religious imagery for worship, historical and social records, private and public commissions by monarchs and affluent figures. Images suggesting complexities of the psyche, with hidden fantasies, bizarre motifs, have existed in the past. Their psychoanalytical analysis however is more recent.⁴ Towards the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century new forms of simulacra are invented, particularly simulacra that can be operated mechanically, followed by ones in which mechanical devices are incorporated. Such moving, talking figures represent an advance in communicative expression combining the animate with the inanimate; that is, they embody the uncanny.

A study made by Bernhild Boie on the various simulacra that populate Romantic German literature underlines the fascination authors of that period had for these figures. In *L'Homme et ses simulacres. Essai sur le romantisme allemand* Boie gives the following reasons for this fascination:

Toute éffigie est à la fois autoportrait de l'artiste et spectacle de sa création. L'écrivain et son œuvre sont contenus dans ce miroir qui reproduit et fixe la représentation naissante et son accomplissement. Dans l'espace étroit qui réunit le héros et son automate vient se loger tout l'imaginaire du poète. On y lit le désir, le bonheur et le désarroi de

l'artiste, les prestiges, les excès et les mirages de l'œuvre. Le don divin espéré, entrevu l'espace d'un instant s'aliène dans la mécanique inerte, mais il revit aussi dans l'objet qui mystérieusement s'éveille et s'anime.⁵

That is, automata are reflections of an artist's or author's ego, as well as showcases for his imagination, fantasies, artistic prowess. They become the artist's mirror-image and part of the artist. For these reasons a powerful attachment develops between the artist and his creature-creations. The automaton houses the poetic and creative imagination; it provides a spatial dwelling for the imagination.

In *L'Homme et ses simulacres. Essai sur le romantisme allemand* Boie looks at the origins of automata in the form of puppets, dolls, including the important status these held in the creative imagination, especially because of the automaton's bizarre mobile capacities. In many cases automata are instrumental in providing a space for representations of identity which the artist can change and develop through the figure's mechanical movements. Automata can act as the artists' alter-egos, as an embodiment of their most fantastic thoughts, intimate fantasies, and consciousness. Boie cites Tieck's *Bonaventura*, there Tieck divides the puppet into three parts: the head represents the king, the string represents the ministers, and the puppeteer represents the people. Tieck has reversed the role of power in a satirical manner through his puppet, now power is given to the people since it is the puppeteer that is in control. 'Car la marionette est poupée, mais aussi conscience. Elle est «libre, sincère, sémillante, oseuse, doucement railleuse, innocemment mordante, un peu narquoise, mais au fond sérieuse et austère».⁶ The puppet has the dual function of 'playing and reality'⁷, beneath its antics lies the factual; that is, the situation or attitude the artist wants to communicate such as political criticism, social revolt, historical event. Boie claims, 'à travers la marionette l'écrivain romantique renie systématiquement toute institution, toute fonction sociale devenue but en soi.'⁸

According to Boie puppets open up a space where expressions of derision in response to totalitarian systems are voiced. They also provide an aesthetic space for escaping from reality. 'Ne pouvant pas changer l'ordre politique, il[l'artiste] le remplace par l'ordre esthétique. Au réel social il oppose ainsi le réel politique.'⁹ From Jean-Paul, Goethe, Kleist, Eichendorff, Heine, Hoffmann, onto Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Hans Bellmer, Boie traces the manmade double's appearance as the figuration of social and political awareness, and of conscience towards what has become unacceptable in the surrounding reality. Such depictions of automata allow authors some form of free expression which would have been impossible otherwise. 'Or la marionette n'est pas la figure de l'utopie mais celle de la réalité sociale existante. Elle en est la représentation fidèle, méticuleuse et destructrice.'¹⁰ This is the function of the puppet: a literary, artistic, destructive illustration of the outside world.

The puppet as man's inanimate double also represents 'la dispersion du moi'¹¹ which begins with man's discovery of his image in the mirror. With this comes the realisation that part of him is projected as external physical appearance. This realisation brings about the need to imitate or recreate that image-in-the-mirror as some form of effigy which comes to represent 'un moi en dehors du moi'¹²; a self-externalisation. This would provide a space onto which the author's feelings, psyche, fantasies, and part of his identity are projected. That is, the effigy comes to reflect an expression of the outside: social conditions, surrounding reality, while simultaneously embodying the inside: private fantasies, intimate thoughts.

Boie's text provides some idea as to the multiple significance of automata in German Romantic literature. It is through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature that the automaton makes its way into the twentieth century. Two works of some influence on early twentieth-century authors and artists were: Kleist's essay *Über das Marionettentheater*, and E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der*

Sandmann part of a group of stories under the title of *Nachtstücke* (1817, *Night Tales*). *Der Sandmann* was adapted for Offenbach, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann's* first act, and Leo Delibés's ballet *Coppélia*. Both revolve around the doll Olympia from Hoffmann's story. Ironically in the stage works man emulates the automaton; that is, a singer (in the opera) and dancer (in the ballet) pretend to be and act out a doll. *Der Sandmann* was also the subject of one of Freud's essays exploring the psyche: *Das Unheimliche* (1919, *The Uncanny*).¹³ It is to Kleist's work that I now turn and relate this to Bellmer.

Über das Marionettentheater and La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce

Über das Marionettentheater is made up of a mix of circus elements: marionettes, dancing and fencing bears; and of the sacred and divine: the 'Tree of Knowledge,' 'The Third Book of Genesis'.¹⁴ The narrative unfolds through a conversation between the narrator and the principal dancer of the opera-house. Both represent figures of consciousness in Kleist's work. The dancer, often seen at the marionette theatre, is asked what could he possibly learn from the marionettes?

I expressed my astonishment at the attention he was paying this species of an art intended for the masses [...].

He smiled and said he was confident that if a craftsman were to make a marionette according to his specifications, that he could perform a dance with it which neither he nor any other skilled dancer of his time, not even Vestis herself could equal [...].

I asked 'What are the specifications you are thinking of presenting to his artistic skill?' 'Nothing' he answered, 'that isn't to be found here as well: symmetry, flexibility, lightness – but with a higher degree; and particularly a natural arrangement of the centres of gravity.' 'And what advantage would this puppet have over living dancers?' 'Advantage? First of all a negative one [...] and that is that it would never behave *affectedly*. For affectation appears, as you know, when the soul (*vis motrix*) can be found at some point other than the centre of gravity of movement [...].'¹⁵

In positioning the dancer as marionette-observer, Kleist is juxtaposing opposite qualities to achieve some idealistic conclusion or synthesis. The dancer embodying narcissism wants to learn from the marionette, a figure of innocence devoid of narcissism – and of any emotions. This constitutes humility on the part of the dancer. Kleist's putting these qualities together indicates his emphasis on the moral superiority of innocence over narcissism. The emphasis of moral superiority is also metaphorically enacted through aesthetics: the dancer's body versus that of the marionette's superior grace. It also forms the basis for a comparison between divine creation and man's mimicking of creation. The marionette becomes superior to the human body (according to Kleist's dancer) if it is made by an able craftsman, but according to an experienced dancer's specifications. The marionette would then be able to perform with greater virtuosity than the dancer. Kleist points out that a unity between different arts and crafts can provide works of a higher quality. A craftsman can make a wonderful marionette but for its movements to be perfect he needs the expertise of a dancer. Since the dancer manipulates his body with an awareness of the effects of gravity on movement, he can therefore give instructions on 'a natural arrangement of the centres of gravity' which perhaps the marionette-craftsman may not be fully aware of. This collaboration (between the arts) would produce a higher degree in grace, symmetry, flexibility surpassing any human dancer's body.

For Kleist these qualities lead to a 'negative advantage': a perfect machine-like expressionlessness since the marionette's soul would not lie beyond, but within the 'centre of gravity of movement'. When an inanimate marionette seeks its animation from a soul outside of its centre of gravity; that is, the puppeteer('s soul), to manipulate its movements it behaves '*affectedly*'. The perfect marionette – as implied by Kleist ('s dancer) – is one that does not need a puppeteer; it is animated automatically through a perfect mechanism existing in its centre of gravity coordinating its movements. In this case its production

requires more than a mere craftsman and dancer; it requires a mechanic or scientist. Taken in this sense, Kleist's work anticipates a future of mechanical marionettes, robotic and automaton-like, and therefore perfect and un'*affected*'. That is, such automata would be programmed independently of outside human animation – an ideal state that goes terribly wrong in the later case of Hoffmann's Olympia.

More importantly, Kleist uses the figure of the marionette to describe a path of innocence towards consciousness. In Boie's words:

Pour lui [Kleist] comme pour ces contemporains, c'est une figure qui appartient au domaine de l'enfance, de l'innocence, de l'inconscient et lorsqu'il évoque l'évolution de l'humanité, il le fait à l'instar des autres écrivains de l'époque. Le chemin qu'il retrace conduit du paradis par un périple complet à travers les voies de la connaissance. [...]. La dialectique du péché et de la connaissance constitue le point du départ de la réflexion esthétique chez Kleist; innocence et conscience s'incarnent pour lui dans les catégories de la grâce: «Anmut», et de l'artifice: «Gezierheit». Le péché originel s'identifie au narcissisme: la connaissance trouve son équivalent esthétique dans le regard réfléchi par le miroir. Mais la grâce elle-même ne peut plus être retrouvée en deçà du miroir, mais seulement au-delà; non pas avant, mais après l'étape de la réflexion.¹⁶

Kleist sees the marionette as a part of childhood's spontaneous and innocent world. Once adolescence sets in, with it comes the consciousness of one's image and an awareness of the body, any resemblance to marionettes becomes a symbol or metaphor for clinging onto a lost childhood or idyllic stage. For Kleist the true idyllic stage is to be arrived at after awareness and the knowledge of sin have taken place, have been struggled against, and a cycle from innocence, to consciousness, and after that to a state of 'grace' is completed. For Kleist, the liberation from sin and the body takes place through reflective self-knowledge due to moral reasoning recreated in aesthetic experience – as the latter was understood during Kleist's time.

Modern aesthetics was born in the mid-eighteenth century. The term

‘aesthetics’ as ‘the attainment of knowledge by means of the senses’ was coined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in his two-volume *Aesthetica* (1750-8). There Baumgarten stresses the ‘confusion inherent in the particular experience of beauty’.¹⁷ In other words, Baumgarten stresses beauty’s power over the mind’s rationality. Baumgarten’s definition of aesthetics was taken up by his pupil Immanuel Kant. Kant was the first philosopher since Plato to lend an essential role to aesthetics in that he considered metaphysics and ethics incomplete without a theory on aesthetics. Kleist’s ideas on knowledge and observation that desire a going beyond man’s body and imperfections to achieve ‘grace’ or to obtain a glimpse of the ‘divine order’ come close to Kant’s ideas:

Only a rational being can experience beauty, and without the experience of beauty, rationality is unfulfilled. It is only in the aesthetic experience of nature, Kant suggests, that we grasp the relation of our faculties to the world, and so understand both our limitations, and the possibility of transcending them. Aesthetic experience intimates to us that our point of view is, after all, only *our* point of view, and that we are no more creators of nature than we are creators of the point of view from which we observe and act on it. Momentarily we stand outside that point of view, not so as to have knowledge of a transcendent world, but so as to perceive the harmony that exists between our faculties and the objects in relation to which they are employed. At the same time we sense the divine order that makes harmony possible.¹⁸

The above passage underlines the importance of aesthetic experience stressing it as a condition of the thinking subject’s rationality, and a way of transcending this rationality. In other words, feeling and thinking have to be interrelated and dependent on one another for an individual’s faculties to be complete, for a deeper knowledge of the world to be possible, for greater spirituality. Relating the above to Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*: the narrator and dancer represent ‘embodiments of the principle of subjectivity’.¹⁹ Both are individuals capable of criticism through observation, here aesthetic and religious, both are capable of autonomous actions, as well as their possessing ‘idealistic

philosophy'.²⁰ In reconciling aesthetic forms such as the dancer (as physical being) and marionette (inanimate aesthetic object) with figures of subjectivity such as the narrator and the dancer (as mental, critical beings), Kleist creates a link between the faculties and an outside aesthetic object: marionette. The marionette is a physical object created by human imagination and craft. It reflects a separation between the mind-force that creates and animates it, and the body it possesses as opposed to the harmony in the human dancer – made up of mind and body. On the other hand, human faculties constitute subjectivity whose structure 'is grasped [...] in philosophy, namely, as abstract subjectivity in Descartes's "*cogito ergo sum*" [the thinking-subject] and in the form of absolute self-consciousness in Kant'; that is, in 'the structure of a self-relating, knowing subject that bends back on itself as object in order to grasp itself as in a mirror image – literally in a "speculative" way.'²¹

'Absolute self-consciousness' in Kant's terms is consciousness that perceives objects and allocates properties to them, and has also achieved a level of understanding of how consciousness itself functions as a perceiving instrument, how it grasps reality. That is, how 'it [consciousness] has itself as object'. Hegel calls this 'latent self-consciousness',²² stating that self-consciousness cannot exist by itself, it has to have other objects to compare itself with, to differentiate itself from, to be in disaccord with, and not just to be in harmony.

The dancer sees the marionette, then proceeds to observe it regularly. The dancer's regular observation of the marionette stems out of a need to imitate it, to learn more about the relation between figurative-structure and movement, to criticise what grace it lacks, and imagine how this can be rectified. The dancer dreams of the creation of a perfectly structured ideal marionette considering this a worthwhile purpose. 'Purposiveness (or the appearance of a purpose)' in Kant's system is a combination of Aristotelian teleology (the study of an aim in nature) and empiricism (the generation of knowledge by 'detecting regularity through observation').²³ The dancer's teleological aim is in achieving 'lightness,

flexibility, grace' through regular observation of marionettes with which he compares his own body. Regular observation and comparison bring about the speculative. These furnish the basis for 'the self-relating knowing subject that bends back upon itself as object, in order to grasp itself as a mirror image' (quoted above). Speculative contemplation increases the dancer's self-awareness and consciousness. The dancer's comparing himself with marionettes turns reflective, becoming the dancer's self-knowledge. That is, self-comparison with an external object produces consciousness of one's (here the dancer's physical) limitations. As Kleist depicts, this self-knowledge makes the dancer long to go beyond mirror-image and appearance: 'au-delà' and 'après l'étape de la réflexion' – in Boie's words. That is, he longs to go from a reflective self-knowledge where he sees himself as an empirical real object with defects, to a perfect object transcending physical limitations and possessing ideal qualities: 'lightness', 'flexibility' and 'grace'.

'Hegel sees the essence of the modern world gathered into its focal point in Kantian philosophy.'²⁴ To Hegel, however, Kant's 'expressing the modern world in an edifice of thought means only reflecting the essential features of the age as in a mirror – which is not the same as conceiving [*begreifen*] it.'²⁵ Kant divides objects into categories: empirical objects and transcendental objects. Instead of Kant's categorical divisions, Hegel wants to arrive at a synthesis by looking at the same objects from different perspectives. Elements of Kant's and Hegel's ideas exist in Kleist's novel through his discussion of art in the forms of dancer and marionettes. The dancer is not satisfied just to comment on what he observes and compare his body with the marionette. He deems it necessary to combine observation with comparison and achieve a concept that goes beyond mere reflection; a synthesis out of observation and comparison that is driven by desire: to appropriate and master perfection. Furthermore, Hegel's dialectics of thesis and antithesis that result in synthesis can be applied to the narrator as thinking subject (being), versus the marionette as empty physical object

(nothingness), with the dancer *becoming* a synthesis of the two because of his contact with this outside object.

Hegel takes aesthetics further than Kant. Hegel shares Johann Cristoph Friedrich Schiller's view that the aesthetic impulse is fundamental to human nature. According to Habermas, Hegel borrows Schiller's conceptualisation of 'the reflective art of Romanticism': a modern art 'which *strives for* the ideal of a mediated unity with nature' and integrates Schiller's ideas into 'his concept of the absolute spirit'²⁶ where:

In art in general the spirit is said to catch sight of itself as the simultaneous occurrence of self-externalization and return-to-self. Art is the sensuous form in which the absolute is grasped *intuitively*, whereas religion and philosophy afford higher forms in which the absolute already *represents* [*vorstellt*] and *conceives* [*begreift*] itself. Art therefore discovers an inner limit in the sensible character of its medium and finally points beyond the boundaries of its mode of presentation to the absolute. There is an 'after' of art.²⁷

Kleist is using art forms: literature, puppets, dancers, to go beyond art in his essay. He brings together the principles of 'self-externalization and return-to-self', by placing the dancer in front of the marionette which then becomes the outside object for self-comparison. This leads to the dancer's heightened self-awareness. Kleist also expresses the Hegelian aesthetic on art going 'beyond the boundaries of its mode of presentation to the absolute' through reflective self-knowledge beginning in art which is 'sensuous form' and 'intuition'. This then transcends beyond appearances towards 'higher forms': religion, metaphysics, absolute knowledge as discussed in *Über das Marionettentheater*.

Kleist ('s narrator) is not alone in questioning the power of marionettes: human simulacra without brain or soul, whose animations depend on human faculties, in particular on the imagination. 'Qu'est-ce donc qui peut être exprimé par la marionnette et non par un être humain? En quoi consiste sa force?

Quelqu'étrange que cela puisse paraître: en ce qu'elle n'est pas vivante.'²⁸

Sergueï Obratzov's questions in *De l'Art du théâtre de marionnette* are similar to Kleist's narrator's questions: 'What can be learned from the marionette?' and 'What advantage does it have over human beings?'.²⁹ These questions find an answer in Habermas's formulation of Hegel:³⁰ a puppet is an art form, sensuous and allowing 'the absolute' to be 'grasped intuitively'. In other words, 'the absolute' is felt through an artist's creativity when it transcends the senses to give an intuition of the divine, of what lies beyond the visible and tangible. Kleist and Obratzov, through the marionette, are using 'art as a power of reconciliation indicative of the future,' in agreement with 'the common conviction of the friends gathered in Frankfurt – Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel.'³¹ As the puppet theatre was in Kleist's words 'an art intended for the masses', this falls into step with Hegel's idea of the reconciliatory quality of art in that 'the religion of reason is supposed to deliver itself up to art in order to be shaped into popular religion.'³² Art in the form of marionette-theatre takes place initially as a result of studied creative thought, triggered off by some ideal: political discontent, social criticism, Romantic idealism, satire, that becomes transformed into mass entertainment.

'We see that in the organic world, as reflection grows darker and weaker, grace emerges more brilliantly and commandingly. But just as the section drawn through infinity, or just as the image in a concave mirror turns up before us again after having moved off into an endless distance, so too grace itself returns when knowledge has gone through an infinity. Grace also appears purest in that human form which has either no consciousness or an infinite one, that is, in a puppet or a god.'

'Therefore,' I said, somewhat bewildered, 'we would have to eat again from the Tree of Knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?''³³

Kleist's essay created a 'surcharge' of criticism. His seven-page essay engendered thousands of pages of analytical studies from several authors including: Walter Siltz, Hanna Hellmann, Jean Starobinski (*L'Œil vivant*).³⁴ In

addition Kleist's perplexing work resulted in different readings and provoked 'des réactions en sens inverse.'³⁵ Most critics pointed out that Kleist's work illustrates three stages of humanity: childhood innocence, the loss of innocence brought about by the consciousness of one's image, and the path that leads to regaining lost innocence. In the above passage, Kleist writes about human conditions such as the narcissism due to one's discovery of his/her image in the mirror and the consequent self-admiration this produces. Kleist sees this as sinful. Since man cannot return to childhood-paradise the only option he has is to go beyond consciousness by seeking deeper knowledge, Kleist adds.

However *Über das Marionettentheater*'s main objective is to underline the superiority marionettes have over man. Perhaps one reason for marionette-superiority over man is the latter's dependance on time throughout his life. The marionette is independent of time remaining true to itself since it is devoid of soul, of consciousness, and represents an eternal stage of innocence. Marionettes do not have to go through trials to attain grace. Grace takes place through an 'arrangement of the centres of gravity'; that is, through the right structure leading to perfect movement.

Kleist's linking of art to mechanical movement can be read as a metaphor for linking beauty to communication. 'Dans son analyse du beau, Kleist part du mouvement puisque la grâce ne s'épanouit qu'à partir d'une exigence intérieure spontanée. Par là s'amorce la transposition d'un problème esthétique en termes de mécanique.'³⁶ The link between beauty and grace with mechanics is made through man's finding the right structure that leads to graceful marionettes. With this Kleist metaphorically emphasizes that man's finding the right structure in an external object (similar to himself) becomes a self-reflexive discovery of the right qualities within himself needed to attain grace. In other words, the road to salvation, to eating from the 'Tree of Knowledge' lies in man's hands; in his capacity to perfect himself internally. 'L'effigie donne à voir et l'artiste se lit en elle.'³⁷ Kleist's essay, then, implies that grace and salvation for

man lie in his observation of and self-comparison with marionettes. It is through an aesthetic experience that leads one to observe the creativity of others, to compare this with one's own creative capacities, and to reflect on the latter that one achieves deeper knowledge about oneself. This, then, would be the true reason why a dancer embodying narcissism is watching marionettes.

Art, and therefore beauty based on mechanical movement, are the result of a specific marionette structure, according to Kleist.³⁸ Kleist's concept of beauty is a Romantic one comprising harmony and grace. Bellmer's concept of beauty is convulsive and compulsive, as I discuss further on. In the literature on Bellmer Kleist is mentioned as an influence on Bellmer's dolls and comparisons between them have often been made there.³⁹ This influence arises mainly because of the insistence on the importance of mechanical structure these two share, because of their common view that mechanics and movement permit other possibilities of expression, even though their purposes differ. Boie claims that Bellmer's dolls are related to Kleist's marionette because of mechanical structure. Kleist's account of marionette-mechanics as a metaphor for grace is given through literature, Bellmer's dolls are sculpture and drawings. Before turning to mechanical elements as the basis for a comparison between Kleist and Bellmer, a few words need to be said on Bellmer's interpretations of Kleist's marionettes, of their grace and mechanics via his illustrations for a modern (1962) version of Kleist's essay.⁴⁰

Bellmer's drawings (figs.1-3 are examples) interpreting marionettes with centres of gravity producing perfect movements (I imagine) are a far cry from what Kleist must have intended. They are anatomical drawings with splayed and multiplied limbs. They are also violent images of erotic affectation. Through such illustrations Bellmer refuses to admit to Kleist's marionette-state of grace. His Kleist-marionette interpretations are subjective, insistant on an experience of violence. Bellmer's illustrations of Kleist's marionettes are images of a sexual nature and quite perverse.

Kleist's marionette is a Romantic concept of what humanity lacks: graceful and perfect movement related to an inner theological grace. 'Le geste est l'expression inconsciente d'un corps' in Kleist's case can be taken to mean perfect gestures are expressed by viceless bodies.⁴¹ Bellmer's dolls do not have any theological function. They are aesthetic and psychological objects largely through their mechanical structure. In Bellmer's words:

Je pense que les différents modes d'expression: pose, geste, acte, son, mot, graphisme, création d'objet [...] résultent tous d'un même ensemble de mécanismes psycho-physiologiques, qu'ils obéissent tous à une même loi de naissance.⁴²

The idea that different forms of expression: thinking, writing, sound, movement, creativity, arise from a common psychological and physiological process comes close to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical ideas via Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer suggests that 'experience comes to us through our bodies' stating:

Every true act of his will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he [man] cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body. The act of will and the action of the body are not two different states objectively known, connected by the bond of causality; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect, but are one and the same thing though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly and then in perception for the understanding. The action of the body is nothing but the act of will objectified, i.e. translated into perception.⁴³

In Schopenhauer's opinion gesture is not unconscious-body movement, gesture is the extension of mental process and a part of deliberate action. Proceeding along the lines of Schopenhauer's reasoning, art is an 'act of will objectified'; that is, art is a creative process translated into body movement made into a creative product. How an artist desires to form an artwork takes place through a dynamic and performative process that becomes art objet and in turn needs to be contemplated as an 'act of will'. Schopenhauer's 'act of will' is taken up by

Nietzsche and transformed into 'the will to power' where 'art, no longer confined to surface impressions, becomes the process through which we shape the world'.⁴⁴ Art takes on an active role stemming from the 'will to power'. This means that creation also involves some form of violence such as: quotation, fragmentation, decontextualisation, disintegration, decline, destruction, within the confines of its formation. By definition every act that is a will to power brings with it some form of domination, and the belief in exclusive sovereignty, which is not without violence in the attainment of the desired power. For Bellmer 'the act of will' as 'action of the body' is represented by what he calls 'les mécanismes psycho-physiologiques' all obeying 'une même loi de naissance' (above): Bellmer's form of the Nietzschean 'will to power'. Based on this 'loi' that gives birth to Bellmer's 'mécanismes psycho-physiologiques,' Bellmer imposes his will through creative production. One can read in Bellmer's dolls the implementation of a forceful sex drive poured into an art object. This negative current (negative because Bellmer's dolls are in a sad state of fragmentation as I discuss in due course) results from 'the occurrence of an unsalutary, masochistic inversion of the very core of the will to power' in which 'the nihilistic domination of the subject-centred reason is conceived as the result and expression of a perversion of a will to power'.⁴⁵ In Bellmer's work mechanical structure plays a primordial and symbolic role for body movement since it hypothetically dictates and controls movement in his dolls. As a result this mechanical structure provides the space for a hypothetical unfolding of the 'will to power'. It is through mechanical structure that Bellmer exercises an imaginary control over his dolls. This will become clear in my analysis of Bellmer's *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce*, 1937 (fig.4), consisting of several ball joints, presently.

Kleist's 'natural arrangements of a centre of gravity' become transformed in a construction Bellmer calls the ball joints. Boie writes 'En definitive, là où Kleist avait établi l'équation: mouvement commandé par la gravité = grâce,

Bellmer en postule une autre: articulation à cadran = foyer = centre où émane toute pulsion sensible. La poupée «suscite la poésie» parce que, écrit Bellmer, elle est «personnifiée, mobile, passive, adaptable et incomplète».⁴⁶ Poetry, feeling ('pulsions sensibles') that include pain and, in Paul Éluard's words, 'la foi en l'enfance'⁴⁷ form part of Bellmer's ideas of beauty.⁴⁸ Instead of Kleist's centres of gravity of movement, Bellmer creates the ball joint or the Cardan joint which he also calls the 'principle of the focal point' (*Das Brennpunktprinzip*), as Sue Taylor explains.⁴⁹

Bellmer's ball joint invention was actually inspired by Renaissance figurine-sculptures. Bellmer's first encounter with ball joints was in Berlin's *Kaiser Friedrich Museum*. In 1935 Bellmer and the dollmaker Lotte Pritzel visit the museum. There Bellmer sees a couple of wooden statues, fig.5, made by an anonymous sculptor – circle of Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). The sculpted figures of a man and a woman were 'articulés autour d'une «boule de ventre» centrale, «et mobile jusqu'aux doigts de pieds».⁵⁰ However, the main Renaissance influence on Bellmer's ball joints was the Milanese scientist and inventor Girolamo Cardano (1501-1579). Bellmer attentively studied Cardano's writings on joints. He acknowledges his debt to Cardano's work in 'Notes au sujet de la jointure à boule' – preface to *Les Jeux de la poupée* (1938). There Bellmer describes how the ball joint allows for the displacement and reversibility of body parts. This can shift the centre of gravity from one part of the body to another. That is, it can symbolically shift fictitious body experiences from one part of the body to another. The ball joint allows for variations and permutations of the doll's body parts. Each doll body-part is associated with imaginary sensations, mostly erotogenic. The latter are projected onto the artwork as the acting out of sensations, and the situation or narrative the artist wants to communicate through his art. In *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, Therese Lichtenstein explains this and quotes Bellmer:

The bodily expressions of the doll reveal both physiological and psychological realities. For Bellmer, the replacement of one body part by another constitutes a doubling [...]. Here, the concept of doubling is critical, both for Bellmer's construction of images and his development of ideas about the self in his writings. Bellmer also emphasizes the spectator's subjective response to these substitutions. He claims such displacement stems from an original conflict between desire and its prohibition, related to the crisis of puberty. This conflict, Bellmer says, can only lead to the repression of sexuality and to its projections on the eye, ear, or nose – a displacement that explains the hyperbolic valorization of the sensory organs and the dramatization of their functions [...]. In 'Notes on the Ball Joint' [...] he states: 'As in a dream, the body can change the centre of gravity of its images. Inspired by a curious spirit of contradiction, it can add to one what it has taken from another: for instance it can place the leg on top of the arm, the vulva in the armpit, in order to make "compressions," "proofs of analogies," "ambiguities," "puns," strange anatomical "probability calculations."' It is in this sense that Bellmer refers to the doll as a game, one that 'pertains to the category of experimental poetry'.⁵¹

In other words, Bellmer's dolls illustrate a physiological expression of a psychological state: that of the body's simultaneous reaction to and acting out of the experience of sexuality, in particular that of repressed sexuality. According to Bellmer, puberty's first encounters with sexuality and its repression bring about intense feelings confusing the senses and by extension the body organs with one another. This confused state of doubling and organ-permutations are the effects of a sexual experience Bellmer depicts in his doll-images. In the visualisation of the body and its realisation through an automaton, there is a significant discrepancy between Kleist's aesthetic thinking and Bellmer's – which is clearly seen in Bellmer's illustrations of Kleist's work.

La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce is largely based on ball joints. Bellmer returns again to this theme in 1967: fig.6. I shall discuss the first version, fig.4, here. In *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce* the ball joints double for sexual organs (a common doubling in Bellmer). There the ball joint represents a 'mécanique de désir' according to Masson.⁵² This device allows creative play by structuring

and destructuring, by giving it movement and fixing its movement. Simultaneously the ball joint triggers off mental and imagined sexual desire through its fictional rehearsal of imaginary-sexual play on the joints that double for sexual organs. These sexual organ-ball joints are linked to one another by wooden and metal rods. Metal is a conductor, wood is an insulator. The artwork becomes a metaphorical illustration for parts of the body where sexual sensation is weak and gets cut off, or is reflected and displaced onto other regions, creating nodes of maximum sensation and sexual excitement. (Nodes are areas where energy gets collected, scientifically speaking.)

In opposition to Kleist's marionette, *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce*'s rods do not impart 'lightness, flexibility,' they weigh the structure down and fix it to its base. Bellmer has reduced the human body to its sexual organs and erogenic zones. Through this it appears that Bellmer communicates the power sexuality exercises over the mental faculties. *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce* displays dual sexuality in that its ball joints and parts of its structure are feminine: female breasts, red lips, vulva, whereas others are masculine: male testicles and its overall structure resembles a phallic-shape. In other words, it displays male-female fusion. For example, its name *Machine Gunneress* expresses surrealist elements such as automatism in 'machine' and a sexual-symbolism in 'gun'. The gender reversal from gun to 'gunneress' (or rather the choice of the feminine word *mitrailleuse* in French rather than *pistolet*) is ambiguous and seems like a pun on who or what triggers off the gun: female sexuality (the Other) or male sexuality (the self)? The artist seems to be debating whether sexuality is initiated from within the subject in question or from the outside by the opposite sex; that is, from the image of the Other through the gaze. The answer can be read given in the work as a combination of the two. The second part of the title: *in a State of Grace* plays with the theological idea of grace and ecstasy transformed into sexual gratification. Georges Bataille's 'toute érotisme est sacré'⁵³ finds an echo in *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce*

with the displacement of the theological meaning of 'grace' to orgasm.

In *L'Érotisme* Bataille discusses three types of eroticism that are equally intense and can be reversed one into another leading to the same orgasmic, ecstatic effects of continuity over discontinuity.

Nous supportons mal la situation qui nous rive à l'individualité de hasard, à l'individualité périssable que nous sommes. En même temps que nous avons le désir angoissé de la durée de ce périssable, nous avons l'obsession d'une continuité première, qui nous relie généralement à l'être [...]. Mais cette nostalgie commande chez tous les hommes les trois formes de l'érotisme [...] à savoir l'érotisme des corps, l'érotisme des cœurs, enfin, l'érotisme sacré. J'en parlerai afin de bien montrer qu'en elles ce qui est toujours en question est de substituer à l'isolement de l'être, à sa discontinuité, un sentiment de continuité profonde.⁵⁴

Bataille believes eroticism to be a means for the individual to break free from the confines of his being which isolate him from Being as the totality of existence and the whole world. This individual-isolation begins with birth and ends with death, producing each individual as a discontinuity within the process of living. Eroticism is a way by which the individual can feel free from the confines of his body, and momentarily transgress the limits of individual being becoming one with nature. According to Bataille, eroticism can be one of three states, all interchangeable, reversible, and equal in intensity. These states are: the experience of sexuality, the experience of love, the experience of religion or spirituality. It is through any of these three that the individual can feel in communion and one with the world. Bataille applies this philosophy of eroticism in most of his writings. *Histoire de l'œil* (1928) is Bataille's first novel. *Histoire de l'œil* is about a group of adolescents' erotic adventures. The novel's subject includes: puberty, sexual discovery, transgression, murder, madness, priests, torn out eyes, testicles, and eggs that double for both. Bataille's view of eroticism is by definition an experience of violence. Bataille uses body-metonyms to emphasize the sexual nuances of a particular organ or

act as a link between sexuality and the other forms of eroticism. Bataille underlines that the three forms of eroticism start with the eye. In addition he explains that one's need for continuity and the momentary break from one's discontinuity constitutes a transgression involving deliberate violence, even insanity, murder, or suicide. Bellmer's work also contains fragmentation, body metonyms including desocketed eyes, and other images of violence. It is highly probable that Bellmer was familiar early on with Bataille's novel and other writings.⁵⁵ In 1946 Bellmer was personally introduced to Bataille and collaborated in illustrating *Histoire de l'œil* published in 1947, (fig.7).

La Mitrailieuse en état de grâce embodies the three forms of Bataille's eroticism. First, part of its title *en état de grâce* implies 'l'érotisme sacré'. Second, the doubling of feminine with masculine sexual organs, and the fusion of internal-female organs with the outer overall phallic-structure imply 'l'érotisme des corps'. Third, the ball joint in the centre of the structure doubles as a heart symbolising 'l'érotisme des cœurs'. Continuity and discontinuity are indicated by the linking of metal and wooden rods that conduct and insulate. The experience of eroticism leads to a shattering or fragmentation which Bataille calls 'le déchirement de l'être' through erotic experience. This is depicted in fig. 4 by the connected-disconnected body organs, the coquettish beauty of the red lips versus a certain monstrosity in the work as a whole.

In *The Freudian Body*, Leo Bersani states:

The investigation of human sexuality leads to a massive detachment of the sexual from both object-specificity and organ-specificity. We desire what shatters us, and the shattering experience is, it would seem, *without any specific content* – which may be our only way of saying that the experience cannot be said, that it belongs to the non-linguistic biology of human life. Psychoanalysis is the unprecedented attempt to psychologize that biology, to coerce it into discourse, to insist that language can be 'touched by' or 'pick up' certain vibrations of being which can move us *back from* any consciousness of being.⁵⁶

Through his insistence on bodily permutations, compressions, substitutions, and

doubling, Bellmer seems aware of the sexual detachment from object- and organ-specificity that Bersani talks about regarding sexuality. As Bersani affirms, psychoanalysis is one way to put this experience of sexuality into words, for Bellmer art is another. It appears as if Bellmer is trying to 'coerce' sexual-erotic experience, as well as the experience of sexual repression into art. *La Mitrailieuse en état de grâce* illustrates the compression of sexuality and its doubling. It shows melting testicles exchangeable with breasts, a lower part of a female head whose upper part doubles as vulva, rods through which sensations flow and come to a halt. Rosalind Krauss says the following on this work that she calls 'the praying mantis':

In it automatism is rewritten by the insect, recast from the outpouring of libidinal energy into the unstoppable drive of the castrating machine, insentient and implacable. Cailliois presents the creature in a chilling portrait of life's mechanical double, the android simulation of the living being. One of the uncanny qualities of the mantis, he begins, is that its defense against predators is to 'play dead'.⁵⁷

This life fused with death bears a similarity to Bataille's phrase on the pushing of life's limits through the erotic drive to death. 'L'érotisme est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort.'⁵⁸ In other words, death in life is doubly portrayed in Bellmer's work through depicting a type of live-creature that has the quality of 'playing dead', and through an inanimate double that appears animated. In this respect, Bellmer's 'praying mantis' becomes a 'chilling portrait' of the coupling of *Eros* and *Thanatos*.

The translation of grace from Kleist's nineteenth-century marionette into Bellmer's twentieth-century art object demonstrates the difference in perceptions of beauty. For Kleist beauty seems like a promise for happiness⁵⁹: there grace leads to salvation. Whereas Bellmer shows a dark and surrealist concept of it. Beauty in Bellmer's work is a convulsive beauty defined, and re-defined in André Breton's words: 'la beauté convulsive sera érotique-voilée,

explosante-fixe, magique-circonstantielle ou ne sera pas.’⁶⁰ To Breton beauty has not only to be convulsive but it has to be compulsive to be beauty. Compulsive beauty consists of the ‘uncanny’, objective chance, and repetition. It is a symptom.

La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce is veiled-erotic by virtue of its title, as I discussed above in terms of Bataille. It also joins two psychologically incompatible terms. The first is animate, the second is the suspension of animation – the inanimate. The work also promotes the explosive-fixed in the rods that metaphorically allow for the movement of sensation and its displacement from one erotogenic zone to another, while at the same time halting this movement on an internal (fictive-body) level. The work on the whole resembles a giant insect whose mobility has become immobilised. It also possesses the magical-circumstantial in its capacity to magically transform meaning itself in the image. For example, there the ball joints double for sexual organs, they also provide an interpretation (or rewriting) of the sixteenth-century Cardano joint – a *trouvaille* due to *le hasard objectif*⁶¹ – that is transformed into Bellmer’s twentieth-century ball joint (*Brennpunkt*). Added to this is the ease with which one meaning slips into another: the sacred into the profane, life into death. The juxtaposition of the animate with the inanimate, the fixed and explosive, the mobile with the immobile, all form the uncanny. The ball joint is the found object due to objective chance. This is an uncanny repetition as Hal Foster explains, ‘the search for the lost object, which is the surrealist quest par excellence, is as impossible as it is compulsive: not only is each new object a substitute for the lost one, but the lost object is fantasy, a simulacrum.’⁶²

The finding of an object like the Cardano joint was a drive for Bellmer’s incessant construction of his fantasies through it in the dolls. In Foster’s words:

The found object is always a substitute, always a displacement, that drives on its own search. Such is the dynamic that propels not only the surrealist object but the surrealist project in general: this surrealism may propose

desire-as-excess but it discovers desire-as-lack, and this discovery deprives its project of any real closure. For any art staked in such desire as surrealism, there can be no origin that grounds the subject and delivers the object: here this foundational ambition of modernism is frustrated from within.⁶³

In Bellmer's work the Cardano joint, the 'found object' transformed into the ball joint, is a displacement that undergoes incessant substitutions depicting different forms of Bellmer's fantasies. These fantasies propose 'desire-as-excess' in Bellmer's sexually charged work. Yet this sexual (over)charging in the object reflects 'desire-as-lack' in its author keeping him from letting go and finishing his object. *La Mitrailieuse en état de grâce* is one such example. Repetition and the inability to let go of his object are reflected in Bellmer's returning to structure erotic fantasies around the ball-joint in other themes, and in his later recreation of the same structure in 1967 (fig. 6) – this is in opposition to modernism's aim, in Foster's account of it, for progress and closure.

Kleist's intact marionette is emblematic of childhood, innocence, grace. It symbolises an ideal for mankind. Bellmer's dolls are fragmented creatures full of contradictory representations. They come out of childhood yet attempt to break away from it, they depict sexuality and sexual repression. Bellmer's dolls show childhood not as an idyllic stage, but one where memories originate becoming fragmented with the passage of time. Fragmentation in Bellmer's dolls represents the loss of childhood, pain, intense emotions, that are dispersed between memory, primal fantasies, and repression. Bellmer's dolls can be read as the artist's alter-ego, his double, or conversations with the self, that take place through the 'permutations,' 'puns,' 'compressions,' he performs on them. By themselves Kleist's marionettes are inanimate, in human hands they become animated. They contain separate animate and inanimate capacities and proceed through a chronological order. Chronology has disappeared in Bellmer's dolls, simultaneous formation and deformation constitute the artwork. They are

artworks that contain their own degeneration, and decay: very much part of what forms the aesthetic language of twentieth-century art. One example that approaches the sinister in its decayed almost skeletal structure is *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce*.

In *Über das Marionettentheater* Kleist uses the puppet as an aesthetic driving force behind his narrative, and as the *raison d'être* for a theological, philosophical and aesthetic argument to unfold there. I have touched upon Kleist's arguments tentatively linking his reasoning to ideas by philosophers of his time: Baumgarten, Kant, Schiller, Hegel. This was to demonstrate how a given artwork or literature can be deciphered through the theoretical ideas of its time, on the one hand. On the other hand, linking Kleist's arguments to the latter philosophers helps explain how a similar object such as a puppet or doll – that borrows from and is influenced by the past – engenders different meanings due to the thinking of its time. In other words, objects bear traces of the past but are largely dependent on their own temporal context for meaning. Bellmer's *La Mitrailleuse en état de grâce*, cannot ideally be analysed via Baumgarten, Kant, Hegel; it requires thinking that is contemporary to it. I have briefly mentioned Nietzsche's 'will to power', seen as a form of masochist destruction. Nietzsche's 'will to power' gives way to Bataille's eroticism with its three forms: sexual, emotional, spiritual. That is, the 'will to power' becomes an erotic bodily manipulation *à la* Bataille in Bellmer's dolls thanks to Bellmer's discovery of Renaissance movable dolls and Cardano's writings. The latter give rise to Bellmer's ball joint through which he can exercise his experience of violence. In the next section I turn to *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, *La Poupée*, more philosophy and primal fantasies.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann and *La Poupée*

The adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* in (one act of) Jacques Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* had a big impact on Bellmer. Taylor states: 'This opera, always acknowledged in the literature as a source for the doll, offers in its plot intriguing and heretofore unexplored parallels to Bellmer's own familial situation.'⁶⁴ In the early spring of 1932, Bellmer, together with his first wife Margarete, brother Fritz, and cousin Ursula attend a performance of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*.⁶⁵ In the opera's first act (the opera begins with a prologue), the hero Hoffmann has fallen in love with the doll Olympia only to discover that she is not human but an automaton. Hoffmann discovers this in the last scene after he tries to kiss her and she spins out of control knocking him unconscious. Her inventor Spalanzani fights over her with the evil Coppélius who provided Spalanzani with Olympia's eyes. The act ends with Coppélius pouncing on the spinning Olympia ripping her apart. She is fragmented, her limbs fly about, and Hoffmann realises that he has been fooled by appearances. Olympia now shattered into pieces, Spalanzani shoots himself dead. The scene of the doll Olympia's fragmentation is known to have excited Bellmer's imagination.

There are several elements in the plot that would also have made an impression on Bellmer. One is the combination of characters: a poet, a doll, a scientist, and an optician. Poetry, automata, science, optics, all fascinated Bellmer and exist as themes in his work. Another is the theme of sexual desire and disillusionment resulting from the instability of identity, from emotional vulnerability, and from being easily deceived by appearances. All this starts with the gaze, thus underlining the limitations of the eye and the tricks the gaze can play on the mind. An important element comes from the feeling of the uncanny that the opera's plot evokes. This is due to the effect of doubling and the juxtaposition of the animate with the inanimate: Olympia is alive and dead. Doubling and animate-inanimate fusion exist in many of Bellmer's works. *La Mitrailleur en état de grâce* and *La Poupée*, 1934-35 (fig.8), are examples. In the actual operatic performance a real doubling also takes place on stage. Not

only is Olympia alive and dead in the story, on stage a real singer acts out the automaton, then in the scene of fragmentation a doll continues with the role. Another element is the death and suicide and what provokes this. With his daughter-creation Olympia destroyed, Spalanzani takes his own life. This highlights the tight link between creator and creativity represented by the art object. Boie's phrases on what the automaton represents for its author: 'un moi en dehors de moi,'⁶⁶ and 'dans l'espace étroit qui réunit le héros et son automate vient se loger tout l'imaginaire du poète,'⁶⁷ imply here that the automaton's destruction is a metaphor for the destruction of poetry and imagination, as well as the end of a creative era founded on high art and absolute values.

The death element combines with that of love to open and close the plot. Love triggers off the plot's action as its opening sequence. The action unfolds in a series of sequences that lead to the final sequence of death bringing the plot to closure. There is multiple death and violence. The death of Olympia implies the death of high art and the absolute in art. The death of love implies the death of hope and the decline in human relations and communication. The death of Spalanzani implies the harm scientific and technological inventions bring with them. The bodily fragmentation in the work illustrates an end to harmony, to wholeness, and the loss of subjectivity, as well as alienation. Hoffmann uses this to bring about closure with some moral purpose. The moral in this case is a warning of the consequences brought about by the destruction of creativity through its increasing dependance upon technology, the repression of artistic liberty, and the ease with which the senses can be deceptive. Therese Lichtenstein comments: 'it is not surprising that Bellmer was fascinated by Hoffmann's uncanny tale, since Hoffmann created his "fairytales" to challenge repressive structures governing morality, gender and sexuality in Germany, often carrying explicit political or social messages.'⁶⁸ The use of automata was indeed a way for German Romanticism to get messages across in disguise, as Boie proffers in *L'Homme et ses simulacres*. However, Bellmer must have also

sensed an uncanny prophetic vein in Hoffmann's work: that of the destruction of human relations, and of art through technological invention hailed by modern society as positive advance, as progress.

This story in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (as indeed the whole opera) has love and death as its main theme in actual terms, as well as under symbolic variations of sexual desire and its undoing, creativity and its end. From a philosophical perspective, like Kleist, Hoffmann's work belongs to Romanticism's aesthetic view of a reconciliatory art (here with man's nature) bringing together two opposite elements and constructing out of this process some meaningful positive substance such as social criticism.⁶⁹ In one way the work represents Baumgarten's 'aesthetic confusion as synthesis' because it is based on irrational elements where the divide between subject-object is unclear, confused, and represents 'the particular experience of beauty' that 'Baumgarten avers, allows us to perceive these moments as a unified whole'.⁷⁰ This subject-object divide is unclear in Hoffmann's work; and Offenbach's adaptation of it. In this very confusion lies a particular experience of beauty that comes out of a certain discovery of reality through what is hidden and reveals itself all of a sudden.

At the same time, the synthesis in the story can be seen in the Hegelian terms: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Hoffmann believes that Olympia is alive and that his feelings of love toward her are real. He then discovers that she is not a living creature. This is an antithesis to what he held to be true. The synthesis is formed by Hoffmann's realisation that he has been deceived through hasty judgement and the refusal to see reality with critical eyes. There synthesis can also be constructed in terms of identity. Hoffmann's self-awareness and consciousness come into being on encountering an external object that is other; Olympia is an embodiment of non-being or nothingness. This leads to a change in Hoffmann's passive being which shifts into a becoming aware of reality as it actually is not as it appears; that is, into his becoming critical. In other words, identity moves from a static state of simply being to a dynamic one of becoming

through the encounter with the other, with outside objects that provoke differences within the self; that shock the self into speculative contemplation and into critical awareness.

In terms of the narrative's structure the device that can be seen as holding it together and pulling it apart is mechanical-aesthetic creation: the automaton Olympia. The creation of a mechanical doll (an advance on Kleist's marionettes) reflects the creative mechanism of fiction: as Olympia sings and dances the fictional narrative unfolds, her eventual destruction signals the narrative's end. The doll's mechanism becomes the story's *mise en abyme*. It also underlines the important role structure plays in a literary, or artistic work.

In Bellmer's work, duality is not of a reconciliatory kind; it is motivated by violence. Man's environment is violent and this violence is reflected in art. Nor is it a synthesis of thesis and antithesis; it is convulsive and takes on a repetitive simultaneity, a Freudian symptom of doing and undoing, creation and destruction, 'desire-as-excess' and 'desire-as-lack' (in Foster's words, p.46). Bellmer's work is convulsive and compulsive. The symptomatic process becomes a necessary condition for fragmentation in his work, since as the artwork takes form it also signals its own decay. This Vattimo calls 'the death or decline of art'.⁷¹ According to Vattimo this happens when a work of art bears consciousness of the Hegelian 'death of art' in that it no longer constitutes what is determined as great art. That is, when art no longer is an atemporal, eternal, art regarded with awe and admiration containing the essence of the 'absolute spirit'. This new (non-great) art signals the coming to an end of an 'accomplished metaphysics' carrying with it the traces of degeneration in its making, hence announcing in itself the negation of high art; its death while at the same time constantly suspending this death-negation.⁷² That is, the work of art as in Bellmer's work points to its temporality and ephemerality as part of its being art. Or better still in terms of Theodor 'Adorno's negative aesthetics the chief criterion for evaluating a work of art is its greater or lesser capacity for

self-negation'.⁷³ Self-negation here means the negation of its status as art. One pertinent example of self-negation is photography since it is reproducible and a denial of authenticity and uniqueness. Other examples are parody, mimicry, as part of the artwork. Hoffmann's introduction of an automaton and its fragmentation in his novel are signs of the social disintegration that was setting in during the nineteenth-century with the development of industry. However these are not used to indicate artistic self-negation, but as social criticism and a forewarning for the future. Fragmentation in Bellmer's dolls represents a capacity for self-negation as art, among other elements there constituting self-negation. Fragmentation is a form of incompleteness, which bestows strangeness and alienation upon the artistic work. It keeps meaning suspended, always *à venir*,⁷⁴ that is, it is what makes the work perpetually in progress, forever waiting for its meaning and resolution, and never finished, as well as always postponing its destruction even though it announces it.

La Poupée, 1934 (fig.8), depicts some common themes with Hoffmann such as fragmentation, the separated eye, joy and the sinister, desire and death, narrative and mechanical structure. However, *La Poupée* belongs to a different aesthetic. It is based on self-negation through fragmentation and the use of photography. It is an expression of 'the death or decline of art' through the use of *Kitsch* and readymade objects: play, doll, blond wig, bow, hoop. In addition Bellmer acknowledges in all his dolls the construction of a personal space where primal fantasies can be expressed. That is, Bellmer's dolls are sites for the display of psychological phenomena. In Masson's words:

'Le jeu appartient à la catégorie "poésie expérimentale". Si l'on retient essentiellement la méthode de provocation, le jouet se présentera sous forme d'objet provocateur,' a-t-il [Bellmer] écrit dans sa préface ['Notes à la jointure à boules']. Le jeu implique la démonstration et ceci ne peut se faire qu'au travers de la réalité objective (un arbre, une chaise), de la réalité subjective (la Poupée) et du fantasme. Le rôle joué par cet objet provocateur sera conditionné par sa place dans le réel, et surtout sa

mobilité c'est-à-dire son articulation ou sa jointure. C'est la boule qui fait jointure dans la Poupée [...] elle est elle-même l'expression de ce qu'il appelait les anamorphoses du corps, du déplacement du désir et des zones érogènes dans l'amour sexuel. [...]. Le travail de la jointure métaphorise le travail de création qui suppose un travail de corps à corps avec le matériau (physique et psychique) et qui arrache au sujet des souffrances.⁷⁵

In *La Poupée*, a huge ball joint doubles as the focal point of the photographic image drawing the spectator in, and as the pivotal point around which life revolves: the swollen stomach of a pregnant mother. In his sculpture Bellmer uses the ball joint to link material objects and body fragments producing a representation of a physiological reality of life stages. These are held together by the psychological effects of artistic narrative. The image contains a mixture of elements: nostalgia, memory, desire, fantasy. Reading the image from a cycle-of-life perspective one sees childhood and old age placed at opposite ends of the image linked by the ball joint contained within a large hoop. The girlish-bow, the pregnant stomach, the shrivelled hand all indicate different stages of a female life cycle. The right side of the image containing the hoop and a broken leg is dominated by the gaze of a detached eyeball. This torn-out eye gazes down at the doll's broken body. It is connected to it by a string. The eye looks back drawn to what is past. From this perspective it is a remembering eye. The string connects the eye metaphorically to childhood memory, and detaches it indicating how memory becomes fragile with the passing of time.

Reading the image from a purely psychological perspective, one sees the fragmented doll and eye placed on a bed-quilt. According to Bellmer's words (cited in the quotation by Masson above), these belong to different categories. The hoop, quilt, hairbow, underclothes, are the things of objective reality. The doll, eye, are the fictional emulations of life and part of subjective reality. Lurking among these realities lies the unconscious carrying Bellmer's fantasy. The eye and its gaze are directed towards the doll's stomach and the torn

underclothes covering absent sexual organs. The eye's gaze is a voyeuristic, desiring, repressed gaze. It is also a knowing gaze. It knows that what the surface of the image-memory masks; what lies buried within the fragmented metonymic objects is primal fantasy. The image becomes the representation of three sorts of realities, in Jean Laplanche's and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's words:

Trois sortes, donc, de phénomènes (ou réalités au sens le plus large): la réalité matérielle, la réalité des «pensées de liaison» ou du psychologique, la réalité du désir inconscient et de son «expression la plus vraie» (le fantasme).⁷⁶

La Poupée consisting of a desiring-voyeuristic-repressed gaze, childhood-elements, the pregnant stomach, the torn underclothes and bed-quilt, represents Bellmer's primal fantasy of the primal scene communicated to the outside through the image as memory. This primal fantasy has to be retroactively reconstructed by the spectator from the visual material on display.

Fantasmes des origines; dans la scène primitive, c'est l'origine de l'individu qui se voit figurée; dans les fantasmes de seduction, c'est l'origine, le surgissement de la sexualité; dans les fantasmes de castration, c'est l'origine de la différence sexuelle.⁷⁷

The primal scene (*la scène primitive*) is the first primal fantasy. There the child discovers the parents in the sexual act, or fantasizes about such a discovery. This discovery leads to the child's pronounced vision (true or imagined) of a violent brutal father, violator of (an illusionary) idyllic state of childhood innocence. The second primal fantasy (*la scène de seduction*) is the scene of seduction. There the child discovers the beginnings of his/her sexuality as a result of advances (real, imagined, or desired) made to them by an adult. The third primal fantasy (*le fantasme de castration*) is the castration fantasy, resulting in perversions such as fetishism and masochism – I discuss these in the next

chapter.

One can reconstruct a retrospective reading of the primal fantasy in *La Poupée* from Laplanche's and Pontalis's 'trois réalités'. First, material reality or the actual material that *La Poupée* consists of is represented simultaneously by its photograph, and by the photographed objects made up of a doll, an eye, a hoop, a wig, a bed-quilt. Second, the psychological reality is suggested by the juxtaposition of these objects and their specific arrangement. The eye evokes voyeurism in the image as itself, and on the outside through the camera-lens, and spectator. Sexual violence and rape are suggested by the torn underclothes, fragmented limbs, absent organs, pregnancy. The interrupted play represents childhood violation and its rupture. The material and psychological realities lead to the uncovering of a third reality which is the primal fantasy. The kind of fantasy Bellmer depicts, I interpret as that of the primal scene, in spite of the presence of elements pointing to the seduction scene and to sexual difference represented by the castration fantasy. As Foster states, 'fantasy cannot be reduced to these three types, nor do they appear in pure form,' furthermore, 'fantasies are also inflected by screen memory and conscious design'.⁷⁸ That is, there is always more than one type of primal fantasy competing with the others in works depicting and concealing symptoms.

In the primal fantasy, precisely because it is a fantasy, the subject can be in its setting and outside, he can also identify with any of its elements. There subjectivity becomes fantasmatic. In Bellmer's doll-sculptures and images spatial constellations change, are anamorphic, or as Bellmer claims: they are subject to bodily 'permutations' and 'compressions'.⁷⁹ In Bellmer's case they also involve a change of space, dimensions, and medium; that is, they are often transferred from a three-dimensional space into a photographic two-dimensional one.

In contemporary aesthetic terms, the fact that the artwork is represented by a photograph – that is, as its *mise en abyme* – becomes the basis of a self-

negation or negativity. The photograph acts as artwork and *memento mori*⁸⁰ in that it becomes a souvenir of what is no more. The photograph doubles as the fantasy's *mise en scène* and its memory. Bellmer keeps photographing his dolls again and again. The photograph constitutes a staged space for a symptomatic behaviour of fixing memory via a camera-lens. 'Le symptôme devient alors *mise en scène de fantasmes*'⁸¹ embodied by Bellmer's photographs.

Le fantasme est la mise en scène du désir par un scénario imaginaire qui présentifie le sujet et prend sa source dans la satisfaction hallucinatoire du désir [...]. C'est la «réalité psychique» du sujet par opposition à la réalité matérielle.⁸²

The hallucinatory source of desire is the finding of the lost object – real or imagined. Here it is imagined childhood bliss embodied by the doll. One can reconstruct Bellmer's unconscious fantasy as illustrated in the photograph from the elements within. The photograph then becomes Bellmer's record of the past.

In this section I discussed the first act of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and Olympia, as well as linking this story with more philosophy of its time such as Hegel's ideas on thesis and antithesis that produce a synthesis. Offenbach's opera may have been an *hasard objectif* that influenced Bellmer's doll. But each work is very different in its artistic representation and the structure of its narrative – literary and visual media apart – as well as in what each author seeks to communicate there. I went on to Bellmer's *La Poupée* analysing it through contemporary philosophy such as Vattimo's idea of 'the decline of art'. Vattimo agrees and borrows from Adorno's view on avant-garde and contemporary art as art that contains and exposes the seeds of its own degeneration and disintegration by announcing its death as great art, while constantly postponing this death. I also looked at Bellmer's *La Poupée* through primal fantasies and psychoanalysis: Laplanche and Pontalis. In my second chapter I carry on with the psychoanalytical discussion introduced here regarding Bellmer's dolls. In the

next section I turn to Bellmer's personal life and to elements there that could have been of some influence in the creation of his dolls.

The Birth of the Perverse Body

Hans Bellmer was born in 1902 to parents of very different temperaments. Bellmer's mother was tender, loving, and encouraged childhood games and play. Bellmer's father was autocratic and severe. Bellmer's parents, unconsciously, influenced his artistic development and doll-creations in opposite ways. Bellmer made his first doll in 1934. In 1936, his mother gave him a 'treasure box' which she had safely kept for him. The box was filled with bizarre objects each holding a special childhood or adolescent memory for him. This had a strong poetic and nostalgic effect on Bellmer. It contained: 'abécédaire et déguisements, billes de verre et fioles de poison, reliques de son enfance qui lui donnèrent le sentiment atroce d'avoir perdu sa vie pour la gagner à l'âge de raison.'⁸³ Bellmer's relation with his father was uneasy. The father was severe and identified himself with the rising Fascist movement in Germany. Bellmer on the other hand, disliked discipline, hated what was happening in Germany, and was considered a weakling by his father. Bellmer describes his father as 'une lourde graisse du cœur mort, aux tripes d'une caste arrivée.'⁸⁴ Bellmer rebelled against him, first by playing effeminate games disguising himself as a girl, then by creating his dolls.

In the previous section I compared the theme of fragmentation in Bellmer's doll with that of Olympia in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. Olympia's fragmentation is the device used by the author to close the narrative. Like a series of mirrors that reflect one another, the end of Olympia (the artwork in the narrative) leads to her creator Spalanzani's end, which in turn ends the narrative. What makes this story in the opera interesting is the possibility of drawing a psychological

parallel from it with Bellmer's creative drive. Bellmer believes that through decadent behaviour and perversion, particularly through the creation of broken dolls and disturbing imagery, he will be beyond redemption in his father's eyes. This means that Bellmer through such subversive acts of creativity becomes in his father's eyes a lost son. This in turn might cause tremendous grief to the father. It appears as if Bellmer is deliberately reflecting decadence and degeneration in his fragmented dolls to put an end to his father's tyrannical thinking and shock the father into an awareness of the pain he inflicts on his son. The perversion of such artistic actions lie in that Bellmer's treatment of the dolls is a conscious imitation of his father, as well as a recapitulation of his own suffering. In other words, it is a splitting of the subject into a double identification: with the torurer and with the victim. In addition Bellmer does not use this kind of imagery to end his suffering; he uses it repetitively as a symptom of suffering that returns, that cannot be undone, and that he enjoys remembering. In *Creativity and Perversion* Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel narrates:

Jean Brun had the intuition that the Doll is a product whose aim is to dethrone the father and his (genital) begetting capacities. Brun writes: 'The engineer's tool (Hans Bellmer's father was an engineer), so familiar that it made his son sick, is then used in an irremediably compromising way. The father is vanquished. He sees his son holding a hand-drill, securing a dolly's head between his brother's knees, and telling him: "Hold onto her for me, I've got to pierce her nostrills." Pallid the father goes out, while his son eyes this daughter, now breathing as it is forbidden to do.'⁸⁵

Sue Taylor talks of parallels between the opera and 'Bellmer's familiar situation' where 'the tripartite nature of the operatic Olympia – soprano, dancer, doll – distilled into one figure the three erotic female attachments of his own life: mother, cousin and wife.'⁸⁶ Taylor also comments on Bellmer identifying himself with Hoffmann 'who, through a powerful authorial voice, recounted the strange tragedy of his own frustrated desire,' and where the father is split into

and ‘could be despised in the person of Coppélius and respected and ultimately disposed of in the self-destructing Spalanzani.’⁸⁷ Moreover Spalanzani, a man of science represents a ‘relevance for Bellmer personally: a generational opposition between science and art.’⁸⁸ Taylor seems to say that the powerful effect the opera had on Bellmer has more to do with a personal identification rather than it having a direct aesthetic influence on the doll. Taylor also suggests that these personal resonances with the opera are what give an added drive to the doll’s creation; these ‘suggest why the opera served as a catalyst to Bellmer’s invention and why *The Tales of Hoffmann* always received notice, albeit in passing or muddled fashion, in accounts of his life and work.’⁸⁹ The opera deals with creativity and its perils, the risks and price that come with glory. These perils are not only represented in Olympia’s story, but also in the other stories of the opera. (I discuss these in my third chapter). In answer to Taylor’s comments, Offenbach’s opera must have had a direct influence aesthetically on Bellmer’s dolls, and on a personal level because of his fascination and identification with dolls, and not necessarily because of any familial resonances. In a way the opera’s story expresses the destruction that is happening to human relations and art that was equally valid during Bellmer’s time. It also encourages Bellmer to create a specific figuration of the feminine through the body of the doll influenced by the opera’s automaton, Olympia.

Bernhild Boie’s comment on the role of the automaton as the artist’s or writer’s artistic alternative to an unacceptable social reality: ‘ne pouvant pas changer l’ordre politique, il [the author] le remplace par l’ordre esthétique. Au réel social il oppose ainsi le réel poétique’⁹⁰ rings true in Bellmer’s case. Bellmer’s doll started as a rejection of the father, and of the politics of the day. The difference lies in that whereas before in Kleist and Hoffmann the automaton was made as an ideal to escape from or to parody social reality, and perhaps predict an alienated future for human and artistic conditions, Bellmer’s doll contains the violence of reality in her structure, on her body. She is inseparable

from the pain and decay that comes with life. In Bellmer's words she represents his 'psycho-physiologique'-object (p.40). She also embodies the symptom.

On the 30th of January Hitler comes to power. Bellmer writes: 'A titre de refus contre le fascisme allemand et la perspective de la guerre: cessation de toute activité socialement *utile*. Début de constructions de *filles artificielles*.'⁹¹

In 1933 Bellmer abandons his engineering studies at the Berlin faculty and makes his first doll with his brother's help. The doll was made of wood and was modifiable. The fact that her body was constructed to be modifiable gave Bellmer a wide scope for experimentation. She becomes the site for his 'poésie expérimentale'. Changing and rearranging the doll's body parts put Bellmer in control of his object, of the material through which he could express himself. The doll becomes his alter-ego, his double, the space for a conversation with the self, as well as the image through which Bellmer expresses his primal fantasies.

The doll was also of great therapeutic value to Bellmer in his early years as Masson points out:

La création de cette seconde Poupée eut lieu dans un climat affectif difficile car sa femme, Margarete devait mourir de tuberculose en février 1938. «Ses parents, ses amis, qu'alarment son délabrement psychique et une extrême nervosité propre à le pousser à des actes dangereux, coalisent leurs efforts pour l'inciter à gagner la France.» La 'centration' de l'énergie sur la mécanique articulée afin d'optimiser les mouvements de la Poupée permet à Bellmer de ne pas céder à la dépression et à l'envahissement des idées noires.⁹²

In other words, the doll provided Bellmer with an anchor and safe haven. She was necessary for his survival and sanity – a salvation other than that intended by Kleist through his marionettes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I compared Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionetten-theater* (1810) and E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816) in Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881) with Bellmer's *La Mitrailleur en état de grâce* (1937) and *La Poupée* (1935). In each case the automaton represents a metaphor or symbol for what the author wants to communicate. This becomes much more complex in Bellmer's works. Kleist's vision of expertly constructed innocent marionettes full of grace turn into Bellmer's 'praying mantis' sexually charged, castrated; a 'harbinger of death', and an example of convulsive, compulsive beauty. The creation and destruction of E.T.A Hoffmann's automaton in Offenbach's opera come to represent a death of the imagination and creativity, a repression of feelings and sensuality, alienation, strangeness, danger. The opera's use of mechanics and fragmentation furnish Bellmer with *le hasard objectif* and uncanny resonances for his doll-creations. However Bellmer uses mechanics and fragmentation to create work that takes on board psychoanalysis, delves into unconscious memory, is perverse and implements deliberate transgressions. All of the latter reflect the plurality of twentieth-century ideologies including Vattimo's notion of 'the decline of art'; that is, the capacity of the artwork to expose its disintegration as part of itself and constantly postpone its own total destruction. Bellmer's use of mechanics (or scientific ideas) in structuring his dolls, is one form of this decline or disintegration. The use of technology in art becomes a way for substituting the artist which is what announces the death of authentic art, or its author. This happens only partially in Bellmer's work indicating the constant suspension of this death.

In this chapter I also included a brief discussion of the three primal fantasies concentrating on the first: the primal scene. The other two fantasies are the scene of seduction and the castration fantasy. The castration fantasy will be discussed in my next chapter. This fantasy gives rise to the splitting of the ego. This means that in Bellmer's case he imitates his autocratic father using his

art objects as alter-egos, while at the same time empathising with the objects as the embodiments of his pain and as his double. In my next chapter I also discuss the perversions associated with the castration fantasy including fetishism, sadomasochism, all seen through Bellmer's images and doll stagings.

Notes

1. For more on the 'return of the repressed' and Freudian symptoms see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).
2. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp.55-56.
3. For more on this see André Malraux, *La Métamorphose des Dieux* (Paris: La Pléiade, 1957). And Élie Faure, *Histoire de l'art. L'esprit des formes I & II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).
4. Many studies have been done showing the complex psychology of past works. For one: Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical studies on art include Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. See Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, trans. from German by James Strachey, ed. by Albert Dickson, Penguin Freud Library 14 (London: Penguin, 1990). Also Kenneth Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992). Gross gives an analysis of the statue from antiquity: *Lacoon*, to the 18th century: *Don Giovanni*, and to George Segal's 20th-century sculptures.
5. Bernhild Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres. Essai sur le romantisme allemand* (Paris: Librairie Corti, 1979), p.174.
6. *Ibid.*, p.31.
7. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1971).
8. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, p.47.
9. *Ibid.*, p.21.
10. *Ibid.*, p.41.
11. *Ibid.*, p.83.
12. *Ibid.*, p.94.
13. Freud, *The Uncanny*, 1919 in *Art and Literature*.
14. Heinrich von Kleist, *On the Marionette Theater*, ed. by Leslie Willson, in *German Romantic Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1982), p.240.
15. *Ibid.*, p.241.
16. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, pp.165-66.
17. Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.37.
18. Roger Scruton, Peter Singer, Christopher Manning, and Michael Tanner, *German Philosophers. Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.88-9.
19. '[...] "subjectivity" carries primarily four connotations: (a) *Individualism* [...] (b) *the right to criticism* [...] (c) *autonomy of action* [...] (d) finally, *idealistic philosophy* itself [...] the principle of subjectivity determines the form of modern culture. [...] *Modern art* reveals its essence in Romanticism; and absolute inwardness determines the form and content of Romantic art. [...] In modernity, therefore, religious life, state, and society as well as science, morality, and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity.' Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. from German by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp.17-18.
20. *Ibid.*, p.18.
21. *Ibid.*, p.18.
22. Roger Scruton et al., *German Philosophers*, pp.174-75.
23. *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), p.6.
24. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p.19.
25. *Ibid.*, p.19.
26. *Ibid.*, pp.34-35.

27. Ibid., pp.34-35.
28. Kleist, *On the Marionette Theater*, p.240.
29. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, pp.34-35.
30. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, p.139.
31. Hölderlin, Schelling, Hegel are part of several main figures in German Romanticism sharing such ideas. Others are : Jean-Paul, Friedrich Schlegel, Kleist, Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffmann. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p.34.
32. Ibid., p.31.
33. Kleist, *On the Marionette Theater*, in *German Romantic Literature*, pp.243-44.
34. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, pp.166-67.
35. Ibid., pp.166-67.
36. Ibid., p.170.
37. Ibid., p.174.
38. The 18th and 19th centuries link art with beauty in aesthetics. 'The eighteenth century saw the birth of modern aesthetics. Shaftesbury and his followers made penetrating observations on the experience of beauty; Burke presented his famous distinction between the beautiful and the sublime; Batteux in France and Lessing and Winckelmann in Germany attempted to provide universal principles for the classifications and judgement of works of art. The Leibnizians also made their contribution, and the modern use of "aesthetic" is due to Kant's mentor A.G. Baumgarten. Nevertheless, no philosopher since Plato had given aesthetic experience the central role in philosophy that Kant was to give it.' Scruton, et al. *German Philosophers*, p.88.
39. 'Bellmer commençait une collection de poupées d'enfant et s'intéressa vivement à toute la littérature portant sur ce thème.' Céline Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le «faire-œuvre perversif», une étude clinique de l'objet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.168. One assumes that Bellmer was familiar with Kleist's work very early on (in spite of many comparisons linking the two I have not found a directly clear reference that Bellmer did read Kleist early on). Boie links Kleist with Bellmer. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, pp.170-74. Also see Peter Gendolla, *Anatomie und Anagramm. Hans Bellmers "Puppe"*, in *Anatomien der Puppe. Zur Geschichte des MaschinenMenschen bei Jean Paul, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Villiers de l'Isle Adam und Hans Bellmer* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992).
40. Bellmer's illustrations for Heinrich von Kleist, *Sur le Théâtre de Marionnettes* in Bellmer (Nyons: Obliques, 1979). Also see Boie, *L'Hommes et ses simulacres*, p.172.
41. Boie, Ibid., p.172.
42. Ibid., p.173.
43. *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, pp.12-13.
44. Ibid., p.12.
45. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p.95.
46. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, p.173.
47. Paul Éluard quoted in Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, p.171.
48. For example Cathérine Binet made a film on Bellmer's *Les Jeux de la poupée* (1949), with texts by Paul Éluard in 1973. Bellmer asked Binet not to put the poetic texts in as *montage* but to let a twelve-year old girl recite them. 'Lorsqu'elle [Cathérine] lui apporta l'enregistrement, il lui arracha «l'appareil des mains, l'a mis contre lui et a écouté la suite du poème en pleurant».' Ibid., p.171.
49. Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p.127.
50. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, p.169.
51. Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (California: University of California Press), pp. 54-55.
52. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, p.169.
53. Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), p.24.
54. Ibid., p.22.
55. Bellmer was an avid reader. He worked as an apprentice typographer at Malik Verlag illustrating various texts, 1924-27. He travelled to Paris. There he spent three months, 1924-25.

In Paris he met Giorgio de Chirico, became very interested in the Surrealists and most probably came across George Bataille's name and early writings.

56. Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp.30-40.

57. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p.171.

58. Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, p.17.

59. 'Beauty is nothing but a promise of happiness.' Stendhal (1783-1842) quoted in Francette Pacteau, *The Symptom of Beauty* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p.9. Stendhal's actual phrase is: 'La beauté n'est que la promesse du bonheur.' Stendhal, *De l'amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), p.59.

60. André Breton, *L'amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p.26.

61. Ibid., p.127.

62. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p.36.

63. Ibid., p.43.

64. Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, p.13. I return to discuss Taylor's comment later.

65. Ursula is described by Henri Okun as 'the nymphet cousin', in *ibid.*, pp.56-57.

66. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, p.94.

67. Ibid., p.174.

68. Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, p.65.

69. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p.31.

70. *The Continental Aesthetic Reader*, p.3.

71. Gianni Vattimo, *The Death or Decline of Art*, in *ibid.*, pp.187-194. Actual title *Morte o Tramonto dell'arte*, in *La fine della modernità* (Italy: Garzanti, 1991).

72. Vattimo, *Morte o tramonto dell'arte*, pp.65-72.

73. *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, pp.187-190.

74. Borrowed from Maurice Blanchot's book-title: *Le Livre à venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959). A twentieth-century thinker, Blanchot's work describes ideas such as the suspension of identity, the sheer weight of presence in absence, alienation, the fluidity of existence, incompleteness, the inability to find fulfillment. For more on Blanchot's (aesthetic) philosophy see *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, pp.297-53.

75. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, pp.172-73.

76. Jean Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *Fantasmes originaires, fantasmes des origines, origines du fantasme* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), p.24.

77. Ibid., p.68.

78. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p.59.

79. Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, p.55.

80. The photograph as death-memory is Roland Barthes's idea. For more on this subject see Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

81. Laplanche, Pontalis, *Fantasmes originaires, fantasmes des origines, origines du fantasme*, p.50.

82. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, p.125.

83. *Hans Bellmer. Photographie* (Paris: Editions Fillipacchi, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1983), p.8.

84. Ibid., p.7.

85. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1984), pp.20-21.

86. Taylor, *Hans Bellmer: The Anatomy of Anxiety*, p.65.

87. Ibid., p.65.

88. Ibid., p.65.

89. Ibid., pp.65-66.

90. Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres*, p.21.

91. Pierre Dourthe, *Bellmer. Le principe de la perversion* (Paris: Édition Jean Faur, 1999), p.30.

92. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer*, p.168.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING THE PERVERSE BODY

In the previous chapter I discussed how the effigy was used in the past as a symbol for social and cultural fantasies shared by a wide audience experiencing *émerveillement* at the roles these human simulacra were made to play by their creators. I discussed the philosophical and aesthetic roles simulacra played in two nineteenth-century works: Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* and Offenbach's adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. I then looked at comparisons between Kleist's and Hoffmann's use of simulacra and Bellmer's *La Mitrailleur en état de grâce* and *La Poupée*. I pointed out the strong impact simulacra had on the imagination of a twentieth-century artist such as Bellmer. I discussed how Bellmer appropriated this *already there* figure; that is, a figure already charged with meaning and how he reconstructed it to carry the meanings he wanted to communicate through his object. I explained that this choice of a doll-object for Bellmer was due to his past, to the fables he grew up with, to his own experiences and personal memories. I also discussed that Bellmer's repetitive and obsessive doll constructions are largely driven by primal fantasies, pain, repressed sexual desires, and are manifestations of a Freudian symptom of the return of the repressed. I looked at the meaning of symptoms and primal fantasies; at how one can extract such elements from a work of art, and then reconstruct meanings that point out to one or more of the three primal fantasies.

My main concerns in this chapter are to decipher the various deformations Bellmer exercises on his dolls' bodies and to find possible interpretations for

Bellmer's strange doll-stagings. Both these aims require a knowledge of ideas on perversion and its meanings mainly from psychoanalysis and philosophy, as well as the analysis of certain issues in Bellmer's writings.

Perversion covers a broad field of meanings. The most usual meaning stems from deep psychological disturbances existing within the individual. Other meanings depend on the outside world; that is, they are culturally defined, and a matter of geography and time. I shall look at some definitions of perversion that are relevant to Bellmer's work, for example at perversion that is linked to fetishism. Fetishism is multi-faceted. At times fetishism is a matter of culture, whereas at others it is a matter for psychoanalysis. I shall give a brief idea of the development of the fetish from its existence as an archaic, ethnographic object to its present transformation as an object of sexual perversion. This is in order to explain the fetish's ambivalent use; that is, as an object that is one thing yet for many denotes another. This will be important in my discussion of Bellmer's dolls and their stagings looked at from aesthetic and psychoanalytical perspectives (linked to the castration fantasy) in this chapter.

Many twentieth-century artists focus upon some ordinary object or body-metonym, and create an image that transforms the ordinary into the uncanny, marvellous, or enigmatic through its isolation into a central image. Ordinary objects can be projected or juxtaposed in space in such a way as to transform their everyday meaning into the extraordinary or uncanny. This is often a matter of context. One way of rendering the ordinary uncanny is 'by endowing any object of perception with ambivalent fetishist significance' according to Celia Rabinovitch in *Surrealism and the Sacred*.¹ This is done by deliberately placing the object in a context that displaces its original meaning or use transforming the object into something other, often sexually charged, through the subjective gaze of its spectator. The object itself remains the same, but its effects and significance have now changed. The 'uncanny violates the accepted order of the world' since it 'creates a deliberately ambiguous identity (the self and its double),

exposes what is most private and intimate (sexuality) and casts doubt upon the meaning of everyday life', in Rabinovitch's words.² These aspects are surrealist, but also enter into the fields of perversion and psychoanalysis. In 'the isolation of the central image' which 'creates a concentration of power akin to archaic fetishism,'³ there exists a shamanic, magical dimension. This magical dimension, often explored in various forms of artistic creativity, in the case of fetishism goes back to its origin. The modern (later) meaning of fetishism as belonging to sexual and psychoanalytical fields is also present in 'the isolation of a central image'. The two meanings: sacro-magical and psychoanalytical, lead to the co-existence of the sacred and the profane under the form of original meaning and its perversion. Rabinovitch adds that 'the sacred embodies a high degree of contradiction and mutability,'⁴ as I point out when I look at the transformation of the fetish from its original meaning as a religious-cult object to its later psychoanalytical one as a phallic symbol. She explains that through the fetish 'the principle of full contradiction or of meaning that encompasses opposites (what Freud called antithetical meaning) transforms the ordinary into the exceptional and extraordinary'.⁵ This creates a tension between the holy and the taboo giving rise to the ambivalent dimension necessary to surrealist creativity which contributes to a surrealist reading of Bellmer's work, as well as to a reading of perversion in Bellmer's fetish-philosophy expressed in his images.

Among the different types of perversion and fetishism are those linked to the third primal fantasy: the castration fantasy as defined by Sigmund Freud. Along with the primal scene and the seduction fantasy, the first two primal fantasies, the effects of the third, the castration fantasy in Bellmer's work are extremely important. Castration fantasy results in the splitting of the ego, and gives rise to fetishism. Castration fantasy involves the perverse; that is, behaviour or expressions which are considered deviant from an accepted norm, mainly sexual, often including sadism and masochism. I look at Freud's ideas on the

castration fantasy and other sexual aberrations here. But I shall base my discussion of sadism and masochism largely on Gilles Deleuze's text: *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le Froid et le cruel* (1967), where my analysis of Bellmer's doll-stagings (not the actual dolls) are concerned. There are two main reasons for my choice of Deleuze's analysis over Freud's. One reason is that I am discussing works of art and not actual clinical cases – and the doll is not human. Secondly, Deleuze analyses sadism and masochism as literary perversions; that is, he treats them as aesthetic movements of perversion. This comes closer to Bellmer's doll-stagings since these are an aesthetic writing of the perverse body.

Deleuze's analysis of masochism and sadism is based on fiction (that does certainly have autobiographical elements, but is fiction nevertheless); on the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1835-1895), and Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade (1740-1814). From this double perspective of autobiography and fiction a parallel can be drawn to Bellmer's doll-stagings. In this sense Bellmer's images can be read as a writing of the self while remaining aesthetic works in which the perverse elements represent the works' fiction. Bellmer's doll-stagings, therefore, lend themselves better to an interpretation of sadism or masochism through Deleuze's discussion. Along with my discussion of ego-splitting, sadism and masochism, I link and analyse Bellmer's views of the body; his actual dolls, to his writings: *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* (1957), *Les jeux de la poupée* (1934). My aim is to place Bellmer's dolls and his perverse images of doll-stagings within two contexts. One is the psychoanalytical context of perversion that situates Bellmer's dolls as a psychological (inner) state expressed physiologically via (outer) bodily forms with his staged doll-images somewhere between sadism and masochism as fictional narrative. The second is the aesthetic context which places Bellmer's visual work between Surrealism and Expressionism. A large part of my discussion will oscillate between these two contexts in order to show that Bellmer's work is highly complex, both psychologically and aesthetically.

Perversion is deliberately and consciously implemented in Bellmer's work by his own admission: 'c'est ma force de mettre en contact direct le principe de perversion dans mon travail.'⁶ This 'principe de perversion' gives rise to the bizarre bodily deformations of Bellmer's dolls, as well as to the very disturbing imagery Bellmer weaves around his dolls.

Bellmer creates and constructs his dolls, as a result he considers them a part of himself. Often he stages and photographs them. (Bellmer also draws dolls and photographs live models.) In 1953 Bellmer meets his last companion Unica Zürn (1916-1970). He falls in love with her because he sees her as the living embodiment of his dolls. The perversion here lies in the fact that Bellmer's own object-creations influenced his love-choice, Zürn. The dolls come first, then Zürn as their model. Bellmer's relation with Zürn provides further insight on aspects of perversion and meaning in Bellmer's work. In the final part of this chapter I discuss Bellmer's artworks inspired by his relation with Zürn, based on her as his doll-substitute, and point out the perverse complicity these two share through an analysis of their writings.

I conclude this chapter with a brief summation of my readings of Bellmer's perverse body: a psychological body embodying a wide intellect, a rich imagination, a complex psyche and a particular mixture of aesthetics. In short, Bellmer's work allows for various forms of knowledge to unfold through it, and is a powerful illustration of the experience of violence.

Perversion, Fetishism, the Castration Fantasy, & *Les Images de moi*

Man has always endeavoured to go beyond the narrow limits of his condition. I consider that perversion is one of the essential ways and means he applies in order to push forward the frontiers of what is possible and to unsettle reality. I do not see perversions only as disorders of a sexual nature affecting a relatively small number of

people, though their role and importance in the socio-cultural field can never be over estimated. I see perversions more broadly, as a dimension of the human psyche in general, a temptation in the mind common to us all.⁷

The immediate associations that spring to mind with the word *perversion* involve the sexual. Yet perversion can be anything from perverting the course of justice via dishonest means to the creation of odd linguistic constructions that pervert textual meaning, or distort language structure. The idea that perversions can play a significant 'role in the socio-cultural field', as Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel states above, is not that surprising. Looking at different aesthetic movements in literary, musical, visual works one discovers that aspects of perversion are quite common, and a way of broadening intellectual horizons. Random examples of authors whose works use some form of perversion, be it in the subject, plot, characters, distortion of forms or structure, are Arcimboldo, Hieronymus Bosch, Caravaggio, Lewis Carroll, Antonin Artaud, James Joyce, Lautréamont, Bernard Noël, Balthus, Picasso, Francis Bacon, to name a few. In such cases perversion is often deliberately exploited as a means in order to achieve some goal; to change the way one sees the world, to impart some message. It is not my intention to discuss such works, only to point out that perversion can be seen as a 'cultural' means for seeking knowledge, and that Bellmer's instrumentalisation of it is not unique. In Bellmer's case, as in many others', perversion becomes a way of thinking form, of visualising objects, of questioning, of discovery, of fantasizing about oneself and the world, that pushes boundaries and transgresses limits, often very disturbingly. Perversions are generally viewed as abnormalities paving a way to probe into the human psyche and discover aspects of man's inner life, especially in psychoanalysis. One important example is Freud's psychoanalytical investigations and research into the different abnormalities in his patients' behaviour, especially in what he calls 'sexual aberrations'. This led to his theoretical writings on sexuality that

include the three primal fantasies, sadomasochism, and fetishism.

Fetishism is tightly linked to the castration fantasy and is one of its main effects, as I discuss further on. Initially the term fetish was introduced into language to denote effigies such as idols and statues. Fetishism starts out from a religious ethnological context, as a neologism coined by Charles de Brosses around 1756-60 before taking on a sexual meaning.⁸ The word itself *fetiçio* comes from the Portuguese defining an object that has enchanting powers or that casts a magical spell.⁹ From its ethno-religious meaning and context fetishism, then, takes on a psychoanalytical significance that points to perversion and to unconscious repetitive behaviour.

Dans la mesure où ce terme de fétichisme, forgé dans le cadre d'une théorie de la culture, s'est trouvé au centre de la conceptualisation psychanalytique, il doit être également questionné comme un «pont» entre «psychanalyse» et «culture». On a là en effet une notion dotée d'une réelle autonomie, se référant à des phénomènes singuliers – aussi repérables et descriptibles qu'énigmatiques – qui touchent à la fois à la culture et au «symptôme», à l'anthropologie religieuse et à la psychopathologie analytique. Il faudra donc s'interroger [...] sur la double destination, socioculturelle et «symptomatologique»? Considéré de ce nouveau point de vue, le fétichisme pose, de façon privilégiée une fois de plus, la question de la «dérivation» d'un concept d'un registre à l'autre. C'est à ce titre une illustration de cette «double face» du culturel et de l'inconscient que la psychanalyse aide à questionner.¹⁰

Paul-Laurent Assoun points out the strong link between culture and the unconscious encompassed by the fetish (which later can transform into art object) that allows for psychoanalytical investigation. The position of the fetish can easily shift from 'une religion d'objet' to one of a 'vénération et adoration de l'objet même'. Such a shift is not fixed; it can swing in either direction. One realises 'à travers ce déroutant objet-signe qu'est le fétiche, c'est une confusion ou une coalescence du «représentant» et du «représenté».'¹¹ This duality or ambivalence

gives rise to a conflict between objectivity; what the fetish actually is: a shoe, a doll, fur, and subjectivity; what is represented by its objects, what experience the fetish-object embodies for the fetishist-subject who is the origin of the conflict. The fetishist-subject's internal conflict is a psychical aberration since he/she distorts reality to create an irreality transferring it onto the object. This object-distortion becomes defined as a perversion in psychoanalytical terms. The analysis is made easier by research into the cultural and social background of the fetishist-subject since the choice of object is also a sign resulting from and representing a socio-cultural background. Assoun adds:

On se souvient que De Brosses faisait place, à côté des «fétiches généraux», à des «fétiches particuliers». Il note même qu'«il en fallait des particuliers pour chaque personne» [...] : le discours sexologique va prendre à la lettre rétrospectivement cette remarque. [...] là où précisément De Brosses voyait un signe de caractère capricieux de la mentalité primitive [...] le sexologue va se mettre à questionner ce choix comme significatif, avant que le psychanalyste ne le reconnaisse comme *signifiant*.¹²

In other words there is a shift from a collective fetishism where an object represents magical or saintly powers to one that is a personal choice of object. The personal choice of object is what holds the key in the case of sexual perversion. This then demands a psychoanalytical interpretation for a better understanding of an individual's symptomatic, or fetishist behaviour transferred to that particular object. Assoun describes fetishism according to Freud:

– Dans une première phase – matérialisée par l'exposé des *Trois essais sur la théorie sexuelle* (1905) – le fétichisme est défini comme une «perversion» et situé à ce titre dans la conception psychosexuelle générale centrée autour de la notion de *libido*. [...]. Dans une phase ultime, sous l'effet de la réflexion sur «l'organisation génitale infantile» et le rôle du «phallus» dans la différence sexuelle (1923-25), Freud en vient à élaborer le lien entre *perversion* et fétichisme – d'où l'ultime relecture du fétichisme dans la perspective du «clivage du moi» (dans les années 1937-38).¹³

Fetishism, via Freud's writings and investigations on sexual aberrations and sexuality, enters into the psychoanalytical and sexual domain as a perversion forming part of Freud's analysis on ego-splitting. Ego splitting (*le clivage de moi*) comes about when the primal fantasy is the castration fantasy. The castration fantasy describes the discovery of sexual difference; that is, when the small boy first discovers that females possess a lack since they do not have a penis, or when the small girl discovers that she does not possess a penis. In this fantasy males either categorically refute the fact that females do not possess a penis through what Freud calls negation (*Verneinigung*, in French *dénégation* as opposed to *négation*: annihilation. The difference is important to note and will become clear in the section on sadism and masochism). Otherwise males deny female lack through denial (*Verleugnung*). Males that have a castration fantasy develop a (psychological) fear of castration; that is, of losing the penis in sexual relations with the *castrated* female. According to Freud, the ego contains two distinct instincts: the sexual instinct and the death instinct. The sexual instinct is life-preserving, Freud calls this *Eros*. The death instinct is destructive, this Freud calls *Thanatos*. The sexual instinct is aroused together with the death instinct. These are fundamentally distinct and enter into the service of each other. The interplay becomes more pronounced in the castration fantasy. As a result of this competition for survival – *Eros* versus *Thanatos* – the ego becomes theoretically split into a super-ego and a masochistic ego. In negation the ego splits into a masochistic ego fearful of castration and a super-ego seeking to neutralise the sexual instinct by negating sexual difference (desirability) in the female of desire. The only way in which the sexual instinct can survive under negation is through a substitute; through an object that represents the penis thus negating castration while maintaining sexual difference. This then becomes interpreted in the following way: the female does not possess a lack, she has a penis only it is the separated object. This object-substitute is a fetish. With the fetish's help negation gets displaced from the

female's body on to it. The female is then seen as not castrated and is desirable. Thus the sexual instinct survives. Here *Eros*'s survival depends on the experience of fear (of castration). This situation describes an ego that is predominantly a masochistic ego since it seeks pleasure through fear and through the risk of annihilation.

In denial the stronger super-ego tries to destroy the sexual instinct by turning against the ego-part of itself represented by the masochistic ego threatening it with castration in the case of a sexual relation. Again in order to overcome *Thanatos*, a compensatory object is required that keeps the sexual instinct going. That is, in case the male subject becomes actually castrated through sexual relations, there is an object that would compensate for his loss. Again the object is the fetish. Usually in both cases the chosen object is the one the child saw when she/he first made the discovery of sexual difference. The importance of the eye-gaze in fetishism cannot be underestimated. Assoun explains that 'la vue et le regard sont aussi impliqués dans la genèse du fétichisme: «De nombreux cas de fétichisme du pied font apparaître que la pulsion de voir (*Schautrieb*) qui voulait approcher son objet par en dessous fut, par cet interdit et refoulement, arrêtée en route et établit en conséquence pied ou chaussure comme fétiche».'¹⁴ The object becomes associated with the memory and takes over as a cover or screen memory behind which the original memory of castration hides. In other words, that particular object comes to have symbolic associations and meanings other than the original ones. For example, a shoe becomes a compensatory object or substitute for the missing penis rather than mere footwear. The object becomes a sign for sexual difference; a fetish.

Castration fantasy carries with it guilt complexes such as the need to (auto-)punish which usually leads to perverse conduct in gratuitous and systematic cruelty involving erotic pleasure. This erotic pleasure is called sadism if the pleasure is experienced by the person inflicting the punishment and pain on another. Freud distinguishes between sadism as a temporary aggression inflicted on the desired object due to the disciplining of the sexual

instinct, and a hedonistic sadism where inflicting pain on the other is a necessary condition for obtaining pleasure. In sadism the violence is, generally speaking, toward a reluctant victim. If the pleasure is felt by the *victim*, the person upon whom the pain is inflicted, it is known as masochism. Masochism is the perversion that usually predominates in the castration fantasy. In masochism the violence inflicted on a victim (one's self or another) is by their choice; that is, they are willing to be subjected to pain. They desire pain. Freud, also, distinguishes between three types of masochism that often occur in a combination of two or three – mostly as a form of reversed sadism. One type is the erotogenic; when suffering is a condition for erotic gratification and pleasure. The second type is the feminine; when the victim is passive, in other words sexually 'impotent', or homosexual. The third type is the moral; when it is suffering that is only important and sexual gratification is superfluous.¹⁵

In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) Richard von Krafft-Ebing characterises fetishism as 'la prédilection prononcée pour une partie déterminée du corps de l'autre' as well as 'pour des qualités physiques ou psychiques' where among the psychological qualities 'la cruauté est mentionnée comme «fétiche», ce qui renvoie au masochisme'.¹⁶ These last points made by Krafft-Ebing: the preference of certain body parts, elements of clothing, physical attributes, psychological and psycho-pathological behaviour, are all forms of fetishes and fetishism and constitute part of the perverse individual's psychology and character. Fetishism can take on many forms such as being reflected in artistic creativity, or through language expressing a fetishist way of thinking.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) Freud writes:

[...] a reminder may be added that the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children's, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. [...] convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself

unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind. The consideration of these cases and situations, which have a yield of pleasure in their final outcome, should be undertaken by some system of aesthetics with an economic approach to its subject-matter.¹⁷

Freud's use of 'economic' is in terms of what he sees as the psychological stability of the individual. Psychological stability is proportional to pleasure. An unpleasurable experience can lead to an individual's mental instability. Therefore, there is an 'economic' need to neutralise a traumatic or unpleasant experience by creating some diversion that turns the trauma around either by displacing it into something else or projecting it onto something else. In an artist's case this is the work of art. I will relate these points on fetishism, sadism, masochism, to Bellmer's work further on. First I turn to Bellmer's version of ego-splitting, his way of dealing with pleasure and unpleasure, that becomes transformed into the virtual images incorporated by his dolls' twisted bodies. This will help explain Bellmer's distortion of his actual dolls' structures, as well as the eventual definition of his doll-stagings as primarily sadistic or masochistic.

In *Les Images du Moi*, the first chapter of *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, Bellmer gives his account of ego-splitting and the importance of language and terminology in the perversion of meaning:

Le plaisir du langage de créer ou de retenir pareilles formules [anagrams] n'est certainement pas le seul écho de la 'réversibilité' que nous observons dans le comportement psycho-physiologique. Chemin faisant, nous commençons à pressentir un principe, par lequel l'opposition des éléments réel et virtuel ne paraît être que la condition d'une loi, qui resterait à préciser. [...].

Théoriquement le cas [...] serait celui où l'individu entier devrait se considérer comme un foyer de douleur auquel s'opposerait une virtualité, cette fois extériorisée, sous forme d'un double hallucinatoire. [...].

Se fermant sur un fait aussi démonstratif, la série de nos exemples* ne laisse pas de doute que le simple réflexe expressif, défini comme dédoublement d'un foyer d'excitation, ne porte en soi le germe d'un dédoublement de l'individu entier – et qu'il ne mène droit à celui, maximum, que la psychologie appelle la scission de moi. Si les termes

‘réel’ et ‘virtuel’ ne prêtaient guère à des malentendus – leur signification s’étant expérimentalement fixée, il est, par contre, indiqué de prendre des précautions terminologiques lorsqu’il s’agit de savoir entre quel moi et quel autre moi se fait la scission donnée. Conformément à la nature du réflexe nous proposons de concevoir l’opposition en cause comme celle des principes de la sensibilité et de la motricité, comme scission de moi qui subit une excitation et scission de moi qui crée une excitation.¹⁸

Bellmer starts his observations on how distorting language through the creation of anagrams is a psychological expression of a physiological form; language. This Bellmer relates to the body which is also a physiological form whose distortion reads as the expression of a psychological state. Bellmer then goes on to cite examples* of the rapport patients suffering from epilepsy and hallucinations have with their bodies from Jean l’Hermitte, *L’Image de notre corps* (1939). Bellmer acknowledges Freud¹⁹ and is aware of Freud’s ego-splitting theory into a super-ego and a masochistic ego. It would appear that Bellmer is following Freud’s theory of masochistic ego – passive-feminine – as the ‘moi qui subit une excitation’, and of super-ego – active-masculine – as the ‘moi qui crée une excitation’. Yet Bellmer states that care should be taken with terminology when differentiating between ‘quel moi et quel autre moi se fait la scission donnée’. To begin with Bellmer’s ego-splitting is only Freudian in appearance. There is splitting but Bellmer’s two ‘moi’ are not necessarily super-ego and masochistic ego, rather two different images of the ego that could be read simplistically as having separate functions: ‘sensibilité’ and ‘motricité’. This two-image ego doubles into an alter-ego; that is, the (split) self is projected onto an outside double, ‘un double hallucinatoire’.²⁰ *Les images de moi* and their double represent Bellmer’s concept of ‘le réel’ and ‘le virtuel’.

In addition, Bellmer’s phrase ‘l’individu entier devrait se considérer comme foyer de douleur’²¹ – becoming ‘un foyer d’excitation’ later on in his statement – seems to borrow from Freud’s paper *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There Freud quotes G.T. Fechner who states that pleasure and unpleasure have a

‘psycho-physical relation to conditions of stability and instability’.²² This simply means that in principle unbearable pain, intense shock are largely responsible for mental instability. The mental psychosis can be avoided if it is made visible; that is, if it is accompanied by (or projected onto) a physical wound or disability. This can be real or imagined. Bellmer underlines the importance of gesture in the traumatised body, as well as the major role language plays in the demonstration of mental instability. He equates linguistic aberrations with an individual’s ‘psycho-physiologique’ behaviour, and describes the individual as a ‘foyer de douleur’ which leads to his/her instability: hallucinations, epilepsy. Bellmer quotes a clinical example to that effect from Jean l’Hermitte, *L’Image de notre corps* in his text.²³

Furthermore, Bellmer’s version of ego-splitting evokes a surrealist doubling of the body. Bellmer insists on pain as an essential condition for excitement, for sensation, for opening up the body to the outside. This underlines the predominance of a sadomasochistic experience in his work. (For instance his ‘foyer de douleur’ becomes further on in his passage ‘foyer d’excitation’.) Freud’s active-passive poles that are split in the ego are not split in Bellmer’s theory into two separate entities (one active and another passive). They coexist dialectically together (doubled) in each one of two different ones: one real inside Bellmer and one virtual projected onto the outside embodied by his dolls. The real ego (made up of active-passive poles) in the human being, according to Bellmer, splits into two ‘moi’ with differing qualities, and not into two poles of active and passive as in Freud. One entity ‘du moi’ is governed by a sensitivity or sensory principle and is receptive to feeling, sensation, and passive in its dependence on another inside mechanism for the partial relief of its sensation and its projection onto the outside. This other mechanism translates feelings into physical gestures, language, or forms them into a virtual double reflecting the feelings through a physiological (artistic) representation.

In other words, a painful event, an intense experience, an exciting situation

effects the individual causing him/her to feel and to react: that is, to split in two. The 'moi' that feels: 'qui subit', remains on the inside, and is governed by the principle of sensitivity. The other 'moi' that reacts: 'qui crée une excitation', moves dynamically between the inside and the outside. It feeds off the inside that feels and seeks to relate the experience that initiated feeling – pain, excitement – in the individual by projecting it onto the outside, and expressing it through language, gesture or a virtual physical-object-double (especially in the case of artists). This second 'image du moi' moves between inside and out and is governed by the principle of 'motricité'; that is, by movement and reaction. It is physically active, mobile, dynamic, and is passive in its dependence on feelings inside the individual that push and activate it to create an outside projection: to 'créer une excitation'. However, there is an exchange between active and passive roles. The 'moi de sensibilité' is sometimes a 'moi qui subit une excitation' and at others a 'moi qui crée une excitation'. The same applies for the 'moi de motricité'. That is, each can be active while the other is passive and the reverse. Neither is exclusively passive nor active. The reason for this is scientific. In order for something to be active it has to be activated by something else and for something to be passive it has to be deactivated. It therefore follows that they are both passive-active, but appear predominantly one or the other depending on a time cycle. Hence according to Bellmer, the ego splits into two images according to 'des principes de la sensibilité et de la motricité'; that is, as feeling and as action, as a combination of the 'psycho-physiologique'. These are then recreated by one (of 'motricité') into a virtual double of both. Through this the artist's feelings are physically expressed into a plastic object that communicates his feelings: pain, effects of violence, trauma, via the creation of the object's deformed structure.

The links between language, artistic or literary expression, and the psyche are inseparable from the body and from gesture. The body speaks, the body writes, the body draws, the body produces the artistic work: 'l'esthétique n'est rien

d'autre qu'une physiologie appliquée.'²⁴ Regarding language and the body, Bellmer writes an equation that aptly summarises his entire artistic project:

Le corps est comparable à une phrase qui vous inviterait à la désarticuler, pour que se recomposent, à travers une série d'anagrammes sans fin, ses contenus véritables.²⁵

This is written in the chapter entitled *L'Anatomie de l'amour* and expresses Bellmer's vision of love. In love there is a loss of rationality, the verbal gets confused with the physical; that is, it becomes physical. Bellmer's statement also raises an important point about the disappearance of chronology. Body and language are two sides of the same entity. They are two different forms of expression coming from the same source: the individual. If the body is a communicating entity, language coming from it then becomes the communication of this communicating body; what gives the body its meaning – in Jacques Derrida's words a 'signifiant du signifiant'.²⁶ That is, language in all its expressive forms of gesture, sound, writing, art, comes from and because of the body. In turn the body can be made into and compared to language – because all forms of language are expressed from and by it. Language and body are interdependent: the former provides meaning for the latter. To analyse language one needs to know the body that produces it, to express or analyse the body one needs language.

For example, bodily fetishism can take on linguistic forms such as in the repetitive choice of a particular structure, or of words. This involves a perversion of language which is used as an instrument of transgression in perversions such as sadism and masochism, for instance. Assoun links fetishism to literature: 'la perversion fétichiste semble avoir été décrite dès avant sa reconnaissance par la sexologie – en sorte que l'on peut bien parler d'une *écriture* (littéraire) du fétichisme, avant que le discours sexologique ne se soit avisé d'un syndrome propre'.²⁷ This underlines the role of perversions as a form

of thinking: as a philosophy. Art is a language, a writing. Fetishism is a perversion and can also be art that initially stems from the body (and castration fantasy).

I conclude this section with the following ideas. Art is a language. Bellmer creates one type of artwork: dolls. Often Bellmer places this artwork into the context of another artwork: violently staged narratives which he then photographs as I discuss in the next sections. Bellmer uses two types of perversion. One, as a principle,²⁸ is always performed on the dolls' bodies. The second belongs to his staged doll-photographs. The first, the principle of perversion is about the body itself: what lies within it, and is expressed through it via Bellmer's version of ego-splitting which he calls 'les image de moi'. Bellmer explains that under certain conditions of pain, sexual repression, trauma, the ego splits into a feeling-ego and a reacting-ego as a response to these violent and intense experiences. Bellmer's need to project each one of these two-inside egos onto an outside virtual double produces his dolls. This then helps the ego return to its original (undoubled) state; that is, to relieve the real body from its pain (art as therapy).

Bellmer stresses that the human body is the origin for the expression of feelings that can in turn be made into a virtual image reflecting its feelings: 'un double hallucinatoire'. In order to recreate feelings such as intense pain, eroticism, hysteria, on an outside body-double it is necessary to distort its natural structure, to compress parts of it, to multiply and permute others. In this sense there has to be a perversion of the body's structure as a principle to illustrate the effects of violence and painful experiences that lie within the body. This is in order for those effects to be detected and deciphered from the body as an illustration of the inside turned outside. Bellmer distorts and fragments his dolls according to his principle of perversion in order to express a real human condition: the effects of violent or painful experiences. In other words, Bellmer's dolls are physiological forms of psychological states. They embody

Bellmer's principal type of perversion or his fetish-principle.

Bellmer's 'scission de moi' into two images where each image serves to form a virtual double, an alter-ego, is different from Freud's ego-splitting into an active super-ego and passive masochistic ego. Bellmer stages imaginary scenes of violence around his dolls in order to enhance the experience of pain and vulnerability of the dolls. This is done through the secondary form of perversion expressed through staged narratives. These staged narratives are based on perversion that is close to psychoanalysis and Freud's sexual aberrations: fetishism, sadism, masochism. It is through this staging of violence that the castration fantasy and perversions connected to it come into play and become reflected on the dolls; that is, through the image-narrative.

Although it is through the doll's body that Bellmer implements his 'principe de perversion' as a writing of the effects of experience that communicate a real human condition, the narratives he weaves are highly revealing and interesting. Investigating the type of psychological violence Bellmer places his dolls in is important for at least three reasons. Firstly, because this violence lends an insight into the artist's imagination, fantasies, and thinking-process. Secondly, the type of violence Bellmer practices first on his dolls, and later on Zürn's body will better explain the relation between Bellmer and Zürn, as well as how Bellmer perceives the world, as I discuss in the final part of this chapter. Thirdly, Bellmer's perverse images force one to raise questions and investigate different kinds of knowledge about a dark side of humanity. In the next section I discuss sexual and violent perversions and link them to Bellmer's staged narratives.

Masochism and Sadism: Between Psychoanalysis, Literature and Art

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud analyses sadism and masochism making several important points.²⁹ For example, Freud considers masochism related to sadism, not as a separate perversion. (In a later essay, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, 1924, Freud admits to the existence of a primary form of masochism.³⁰) Freud considers that sadism is often an alternative to wooing and almost natural; only when satisfaction is based on abuse is sadism a perversion since inflicting pain becomes a totally hedonistic condition. Freud questions whether masochism is a primary phenomenon or a transformation from sadism; that is, whether masochism is an extension of sadism or its reverse? Freud concludes that masochism can be the result of a projected sadism onto a (cherished) object or of a sadism that turns on itself; that is, onto the subject as guilt complex. At the same time Freud states that active and passive sexual attitudes are common 'universal characteristics' which when exaggerated can transform into sadism and masochism.³¹ In general, sadism turned masochism is due to factors such as guilt and the castration complex. Krafft-Ebing, whose work on sadism and masochism Freud acknowledges, considered sadism and masochism separate perversions; each possesses its unique qualities. There also arises the question of fetishism which Freud calls a sexual aberration and describes in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* under the title of 'Unsuitable Substitutes for the Sexual Object'. There he brings up the archaic religious dimension and states that these 'substitutes are with some justice likened to the fetishes in which savages believe that their gods are embodied.'³² Freud does not directly link fetishism to masochism in his essays. (In a later essay *Fetishism* (1927), Freud does associate fetishism with the castration complex.) However both Krafft-Ebing and Deleuze do link fetishism to masochism.

In general Deleuze connects fetishism to masochism rather than to sadism:

Le fétichisme, ainsi défini par le processus de la dénégation et du

suspens, appartient essentiellement au masochisme. La question: appartient-il aussi au sadisme? est très complexe. [...]. Il nous semble en tout cas que le fétiche n'appartient au sadisme que d'une manière secondaire et déformée: c'est-à-dire dans la mesure où il a rompu son rapport seul essentiel avec la dénégaration et le suspens, pour passer dans un tout autre contexte, celui du négatif et de la négation, et servir à la condensation sadique.³³

The main point to retain from Deleuze's statement above is that fetishism and masochism are inseparable. In the case of sadism there can exist a second order, convoluted form of fetishism that results from a need to perpetuate violence on a further level, beyond the body. In other words, there is a greater desire to annihilate and negate not only the living but objects associated with the living.

Annihilation and negation make up sadism, suspension and *dénégaration* make up masochism. In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, Deleuze goes back to the origins of sadism and masochism; that is, to the literature that gave sadism and masochism their names, and to its authors. Deleuze discusses Freud's sadomasochism and strongly disagrees that one is the reverse of the other, or that one can transform into the other.³⁴ According to Deleuze, elements of sadism can exist in masochism and vice-versa. However, the sadism associated with masochism is not the same as the pure sadism Freud talks about, and the masochism in sadism is not of the same psychological order or structure as pure masochism, in what Deleuze calls a paradoxical double production.³⁵ It has been said that Sade's language is paradoxical because it is essentially that of a victim.³⁶ As mentioned above, there are two Freudian views on masochism associated with sadism. One view is that of a sadism where the protagonist has sudden guilty feelings, this then causes sadism to turn onto itself and become (a form of) masochism. The other view is of sadism as a projected masochism, in Deleuze's words: 'puisque le sadique ne peut prendre plaisir aux douleurs qu'il fait subir à autrui que dans la mesure où il a, pour lui-même, vécu "masochiquement" le lien douleur-plaisir'.³⁷ Freud rarely considers

masochism a primary perversion existing on its own, without some form of sadism. Deleuze, like Freud, considers sadism that turns on itself as that of 'un surmoi s'exerçant avec sadisme contre le moi'.³⁸ But the latter is still a form of sadism and any masochism here is a pseudo-masochism. (Freud calls this a secondary masochism.) From his analysis of Masoch, Deleuze does not consider this sadism-based masochism as genuine masochism. For Deleuze, there exists a primary masochism with its own laws and rituals, completely removed from sadism and its processes.

In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, Deleuze gives a detailed list of differences existing between sadism and masochism. Deleuze discusses ideas from psychoanalytical studies that include Freud and Theodor Reik. Deleuze disagrees with Freud and finds Reik's analysis on masochism lacking. Deleuze also quotes from writers and literary critics on these subjects, agreeing with Pierre Klossowski and Maurice Blanchot.³⁹ He quotes Blanchot's statement 'c'est en cela que, malgré l'analogie des descriptions, il semble juste de laisser à Sacher-Masoch la paternité du masochisme et à Sade celle du sadisme.'⁴⁰ Blanchot underlines a major difference between Sade's hero and Masoch's hero. In the former case there is pure hedonistic pleasure in inflicting pain devoid of any form of remorse, whereas for the latter shame, guilt and remorse are a necessity. (The guilt that turns sadism into masochism is temporary and superficial; that is, it is of a completely different order to the guilt in masochism which is an inherent condition in all masochists.) Sadism and masochism – in Deleuze's and Blanchot's definitions – are each based on completely different thinking-structures and behaviour-patterns. Each structure engenders a different sort of erotic experience. This structure governs what leads to orgasmic ecstasy, and what this ecstasy *requires* as conditions for its satisfaction. In the case of sadism annihilistic powers over the victim are required. In the case of masochism guilt along with sacred or moral projections are turned into the profane. This sacred-profane dimension in masochism is

what endows fetishes with an ambivalence. They become revered and worshipped objects as in pagan rites. The difference lies in the reason and purpose of worship. The former is profane; sexual, whereas the latter is sacred; religious.

Sexual ecstasy in sadism is achieved through different means to those obtained in masochism. In addition, each perversion is of a different psychological order and excludes the other. This difference in structure between each type of violence as an erotic experience will be a key point in my analysis of Bellmer's staged work and its classification as sadistic or masochistic, later.

In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel* Deleuze begins his arguments with the justification that the naming and classifying of sadism and masochism first take place through literature. They are first and foremost literary movements. In each writer's case their literary texts act as a double for their credo on the treatment of the body and the definition of physical desire. Two completely different psychological portraits emerge that are far from complementary, nor can they be easily reversed or transformed into one another. In Sade's (hero's) case his physical desire and pleasure is the only thing that matters, with the others' bodies at his service, preferably forcibly. Sadean heroes are characterised by apathy and absolute cold indifference to others' suffering. In Sade's view brutality should be institutionalised, turned into a law, and it should be in perpetual movement, *ad infinitum*. Sade's society is Masonic, atheist, anarchic, rationalist.

In Sacher-Masoch's case his bodily pleasure, or simply pleasure should be gained through torture, mental as well as physical, inflicted on him by a strong desirable female that oscillates between three types of female profiles. The first is the *Aphrodite* that brings about disorder, the third is sadistic but not in Sade's terms of total destruction and chaos for destruction's sake. The (sadistic) third loves to torture and inflict pain and suffering for a reason; that is, for a moral. (This approaches Freud's moral masochism described in *The Economic Problem*

of *Masochism*. There torture is a prerequisite for the justification of ecstatic experience, and sex is constantly postponed and secondary.) Sacher-Masoch's feminine ideal finds itself in the second. That is, between the *Aphrodite* and masochism's sadistic third. This feminine ideal is cold, maternal, and severe. 'Telle est la trinité de rêve masochiste: froid-maternel-sévère, glacé-sentimental-cruel'.⁴¹ Unlike Sade for whom *anybody* will do (boys, girls, servants, nuns, priests – though Sade's victims are usually not aristocrats), Sacher-Masoch is very particular in his choice of female heroines and his torturers' characters. In Sacher-Masoch's case the torture should be inflicted according to a contract of limited duration, and not without a contract and *ad infinitum* as with Sade. Sacher-Masoch's female torturer should be given the impression that it is she who commands; that she decides. Whereas, in reality it is Sacher-Masoch('s hero) who decides what should be done to him through persuasion and an educational manner built on specific rites that have to be faithfully followed as he stipulates in the contract. The reversal of authority; of the active-passive roles remain ambiguous. There is no ambiguity in who commands where Sade and his heroes are concerned.

Charles De Brosses made a study on fetishism, and introduced the term and its concepts in 1756-60. Twenty-four years later Donatien Alphonse François, known as the Marquis de Sade wrote his first 'terrible' novel *Les 120 Journées de Sodome* (c.1784), followed by *Justine* (1791), *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), among other writings. These novels are based on explicit depictions of cruelty and sexual perversions which provided language with the word sadism as a reflection of such acts. Sade's language depends on the use of obscenity to provoke, at the same time his reasoning and language reflect his period, that of the Enlightenment. 'Quand Sade invoque une Raison analytique universelle pour expliquer le plus particulier dans le désir, on n'y verra pas la simple marque de son appartenance au XVIIIe siècle: il faut que la particularité, et le délire correspondant, soient aussi une Idée de la raison pure.'⁴² In other

words, Sade is a Kantian according to Deleuze. In spite of the obscenities and the multiple scenes of debauchery and derision, Sade's language is beautifully written and his works are extremely well-crafted. The acts of negativity, *le négatif*, in his novels represent a personal element that is only partially destructive. It does not cover the act of complete negation, *négation*, which belongs to an impersonal universal principle of annihilation; that is, to total destruction. Sade wants his personal criminal acts, *le négatif*, to extend to the whole world into one universal impersonal crime. That is, through a crime 'dont l'effet perpétuel agit, même quand je n'agisais plus, en sorte qu'il n'y eût pas un seul instant de ma vie où, même en dormant, je ne fusse cause d'un désordre quelconque,'⁴³ as one of his heroes, Clairwil muses. For this reason Sade's crimes are breathless, multiple, repetitive, in order that personal negative acts all contributing to a higher universal impersonal ideal will be able to succeed in extending to a universal totality.

Sade was responsible for sadism, and the Austrian Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was responsible for masochism, via Krafft-Ebing's retrospective sexology. A history professor and lawyer, Sacher-Masoch wrote erudite historical novels that contained fictional adventures. These adventures always revolved around a hero full of desire for a beautiful cruel woman who enslaves him emotionally, and therefore physically. Only here the physical enslavement is literal and is based upon physical violence and pain inflicted on the hero at his request. Unlike Sade, Sacher-Masoch's language does not depend on the obscene but evokes a disturbing atmosphere that is dark and suffocating. Deleuze explains that Sacher-Masoch's writings belong to Romanticism and his imagination is dialectic unlike Sade's 'raison pure'. 'Et quand Masoch invoque un esprit dialectique, celui de Méphisto et de Platon réunis, on n'y verra pas seulement la marque de son appartenance au romantisme. Là encore, la particularité doit se réfléchir dans un Idéal impersonnel de l'esprit de dialectique.'⁴⁴

Both Sade and Sacher-Masoch write what Deleuze calls 'littérature porno-

logique'; a literature that puts language in touch with its own limits and in a marginal position of silence. It evokes silenced violence and hushed eroticism. '[...] cette tâche elle [language] ne peut pas l'accomplir réellement que par un dédoublement intérieur au langage: il faut que le langage impératif et descriptif se dépasse vers une plus haute fonction. Il faut que l'élément personnel se réfléchisse et passe dans l'impersonnel.'⁴⁵ That is, the personal impulse of violence must be deflected into language and appear official and impersonal. Deleuze calls Sade and Sacher-Masoch 'aussi des grands anthropologues, à la manière de ceux qui savent engager dans leur œuvre toute une conception de l'homme, de la culture et de la nature – de grands artistes, à la manière de ceux qui savent extraire de nouvelles formes, et de créer de nouvelles manières de sentir et de penser, tout un nouveau langage'.⁴⁶ This statement can easily apply to Bellmer. Bellmer's philosophy and writing of the perverse body creates new forms in a singular way of rethinking the body. Bellmer's photographed doll-images become the impersonal language for what is personal; his own version of perversion.

Masochism operates through a contract; through a pact that begins with a letter. There the (willing) victim looks for a torturer and seeks to persuade her/him to undergo a certain shared adventure that aims to inflict pain and violence on the victim. In Deleuze's words:

Dans l'entreprise pédagogique des héros de Masoch, dans la soumission à la femme, dans les tourments qu'ils subissent, dans la mort qu'ils connaissent, il y a autant de moments d'ascension vers l'Idéal. [...]. Que le masochisme cherche ses garants historiques et culturels dans les épreuves d'initiation mystico-idéalistes n'a rien d'étonnant. La contemplation du corps nu d'une femme n'est possible que dans des conditions mystiques [...] une scène de *La Femme divorcée* montre comment le héros [...] désire pour la première fois voir sa maîtresse nue: il invoque d'abord un «besoin d'observation», mais se trouve saisi d'un sentiment religieux, 'sans rien de sensuel' (tels sont les deux moments fondamentaux du fétichisme). Du corps à l'œuvre d'art, de l'œuvre d'art aux Idées, il y a toute une ascension qui doit se faire à coups de fouet. Un esprit dialectique anime Masoch.⁴⁷

In other words, masochism is based on a dialectic of aesthetics and knowledge that turns into violence to procure pleasure. Such pleasure is linked to a feeling of the divine or religious which starts with the eye and observation. These are fetishism's prime conditions.

Sacher-Masoch's most famous novel: *Vénus im Pelz* (1870, *La Vénus à la fourrure*) begins with a dream the hero has after reading Hegel. Deleuze explains that masochistic imagination is dialectical, as well as platonic. 'Platon montrait que Socrate semblait être l'amant, mais plus profondément se révélait l'aimé. D'une autre façon le héros masochiste semble éduqué, formé par la femme autoritaire, mais plus profondément c'est lui qui la forme et la travestit, et lui qui souffle les dure paroles qu'elle lui adresse.'⁴⁸ In masochism, authority is also ambiguous; it depends on masquerade and pretence.

I conclude this section with Deleuze's statement on language and repetition, mainly with regard to masochism:

La dialectique ne signifie pas simplement une circulation de discours, mais des transferts ou des déplacements de ce genre, qui font que la même scène est simultanément jouée à plusieurs niveaux, suivant des retournements et des dédoublements dans la distribution des rôles et du langage.⁴⁹

Language plays an extremely important role in providing a structure for each perversion. The reason for this is that language's repetitive variations in either perversion serve different purposes in each case. Obscenities are common to sadism, whereas descriptive and written instructions are common to masochism. There are several rules to be followed in masochism. There can be no sexual fulfillment nor ecstasy without suffering. To achieve the former the latter has to be carefully prepared. An aesthetic scene of torture needs to be minutely imagined and made into a contract by the masochist. A specific female type fulfilling the masochist's desire criteria is chosen to execute the scene. The same scene needs to be reconstructed from different perspectives, its details dwelled

upon, and performed. Sexual gratification is constantly suspended and postponed through pain. Whereas in sadism cruelty is the required rule, how it takes place and on whom is unimportant. It is immediate. The aim of sadism is absolutely destructive, there is no suspension and dwelling on details. Sadism is systematic and based on hurried repetitiveness in order to gain as great a number of victims as possible. Chasseguet-Smirgel's comments regarding perversion as a means applied to 'push the frontiers of what is possible and to unsettle reality',⁵⁰ as well as several of the points raised above on sadism and masochism, provide the basis for situating Bellmer's doll stagings in the next and following sections. Deleuze largely discusses sadism and masochism as literary genres; that is, as perversions that are also aesthetic and philosophical movements (sadism: Kant and the Enlightenment; masochism: Hegel, dialectics, and Romanticism). Situating Bellmer's work as a type of perversion also requires situating it aesthetically. Bellmer's work is philosophically (or psychologically) based on perversion, but it is primarily art. As art it moves between Surrealism and Expressionism, aesthetically, as I now discuss, before returning to discuss forms of ego-splitting in masochism and sadism further, and how these help decipher Bellmer's perverse images.

Bellmer's Theatre of the Perverse: Between Writing and Image

Bellmer consciously uses themes of perversion as a philosophy in his work; that is, in his construction of the dolls' bodies and in their staged images. Perversion can be read as Bellmer's fetish-philosophy. Dourthe quotes Bellmer's last partner Unica Zürn:

Sa loi fondamentale, écrit Unica Zürn dans *Remarques d'un observateur*, c'est la surprise et le choc, l'obsession d'un savant évaluant un pays nouveau: il le veut sans frontières.⁵¹

The need to shock, to dominate, to explore new territory and create new structures is part of Bellmer's perverse philosophy. The territory that Bellmer wants 'sans frontières', pliant and without resistance, is the female body. Bellmer does not only concentrate on distortion and the transgression of limits in his representations of the female figure, he also distorts language to explore new linguistic possibilities. Bellmer plays with alphabet-word structure and sentence-order to recreate new meaning through permutations he calls *anagrammes*.⁵² Bellmer underlines the constant need to play with language that then reflects on the body. In other words, permutations and distortions of language are the verbal other or extension of physical distortions. This stems from man's basic ignorance regarding both language and body. This needs rectifying, since it is only through an understanding and knowledge of one's language and body that a better understanding of oneself and of the world is gained, as well as of the how and why some experiences effect certain individuals while other experiences do not. In addition, all human communication with the world takes place through language and the body. They are the border between the inside and outside.

Bellmer's analogy of the body and a sentence inviting deconstruction, may appear sadistic in character, as if the body was there for the sole purpose of being played with and torn apart to give pleasure. Yet Bellmer stipulates his reason for this deconstruction: the need to discover the body's 'contenus véritables'.⁵³ This reason is not compatible with a sadistic philosophy of total destruction, but rather closer to masochism for two reasons. One reason is the fetish character associated with such play, since erotic pleasure is gained through the displacement and deformation of natural forms based upon imagination and an analytical thinking, which is time consuming. The other reason stems from the need to understand; it is done for some moral even though this requires violence. There is a philosophical-linguistic dimension which Bellmer applies to the body. This belongs to deconstruction in that new

meaning can be generated *a perpetuo* through different deconstructions-reconstructions of a text or phrase. As Roland Barthes states in *Le Plaisir du texte*: 'A moins que, pour certains pervers, la phrase ne soit *un corps*?'⁵⁴

L'homme pénètre, imprègne tout ce qui l'environne de sa sexualité et son langage est la preuve de son imagination sexuelle toujours à l'œuvre.⁵⁵

Masson explains that it is through language that sexual difference finds a voice. It is also language (in any of its forms; verbal, graphic, plastic, gesture) that serves as a vehicle for the expression of the sexual and erotic imagination. Dourthe has this to say on Bellmer's writings:

Les écrits de Bellmer sont d'abord difficiles. Leur obscurité relative ne tient pas à leur singularité, mais elle naît plutôt de leur structure. Malgré un souci de l'analyse, ils n'offrent que rarement une solution de continuité. Aux traces d'expérience de lecture et aux développements à caractère technique se mêlent intuitions poétiques et souvenirs personnels, que Bellmer choisit souvent de confondre et de tenir pour une seule et même chose.⁵⁶

Bellmer's writings, as well as his images, are complex. Their complexity arises in that they contain a mixture of aesthetic and theoretical ideas transformed into a personal theory charged with multiple meanings that can be read from a number of perspectives. Bellmer creates a structure containing a condensation of ideas that could be seen as unrelated all squeezed into one another. Dourthe's comment about Bellmer's 'souci de l'analyse' is interesting because of a play on words: 'l'analyse' is not just analytical thinking, it is a term belonging to mathematics; that is, to mathematical analysis. Bellmer (the engineer) uses mathematical language in his writings that strongly suggests a technical thinking pointing to abstraction, an abstraction that has no 'solution de continuité'. Another play on words since the problem of solutions of continuity belong to mathematics: differential calculus, theoretical physics. Taken in aesthetic or

philosophical terms, Bellmer (the artist) is playing with ideas, experimenting without finding it important to reach an aim. The aim is always in suspension, delayed, negated, denied. At the same time Bellmer's experimentation leads to an added knowledge about the body undergoing different experiences – most probably about himself. Apart from the perverse and psychological elements in Bellmer's writing and work, which I will discuss shortly through Deleuze's ideas and the points raised in the previous section, his work is primarily aesthetic. It is first and foremost art. For this reason I would first like to develop some of Bellmer's ideas and the elements that make up the complexity interwoven in his work situating it in aesthetic terms between Surrealism and Expressionism.

Petite Anatomie de l'Inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image is Bellmer's most important text. In itself this slim text's double title signals complexity: a dissection of the body's unconscious which is also image. The text is made up of three chapters: *Les Images du moi*, *L'Anatomie de l'amour*, *Le Monde extérieur*. The second chapter, *L'Anatomie de l'amour* is very revealing where Bellmer's erotic image-philosophy is concerned, in particular, the male's image of the female body and its relation to and position *in* the masculine desiring body. I discuss *L'Anatomie de l'amour* in my final section in connection with Bellmer's relation to Zürn; here I want to look at some of the text's general aspects and important points.

The text has been called by Dagonet 'un surréalisme physiologique' because of Bellmer's evocation of imaginary limbs, 'membre fantôme'.⁵⁷ There are other surrealist aspects such as Bellmer's use of effigies to create 'une réalité troisième'⁵⁸ (that of the body in the process of undergoing experience) and his emphasis on the existence of separate entities: 'le virtuel et le réel'.⁵⁹ Joë Bousquet comments: 'Surréaliste Bellmer? Le surréalisme se réclame de lui. Le surréalisme n'est pas œuvre humaine; mais quelques hommes, en devenant sa proie, l'ont imposé comme un état d'esprit'.⁶⁰ Bellmer did write to Georges

Hugnet that his text encompassed everything that Surrealism proposed including ‘outillages, dialectique donnés, bien sûr, par Freud, Breton. Mais il y a là une certaine nécessité de faire cette histoire, nécessité même passionnante’.⁶¹

Dourthe explains that on the contrary Bellmer does not respect nor stick to ‘cette histoire’: Breton’s Surrealism. ‘*La réalité troisième de L’Anatomie de l’image* ne recoupe pas la *surréalité*, du *Manifeste du surréalisme* de 1924. (“Je crois, écrit Breton, à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de *surréalité*, si l’on peut ainsi dire.”)’.⁶² For Breton, ‘le fonctionnement réel de la pensée’ is measured through an ‘automatisme psychique pur’,⁶³ whereas Bellmer attempts to construct ‘une mise à nu du réel’ that delves deep into ‘l’homme viscéral’, and turns this introspection into ‘l’expérience qui consiste à découvrir l’homme «à des profondeurs viscérales» sans achèvement possible, car le corps est mis en jeu dans un mouvement de transformation constante’.⁶⁴

Bellmer seeks to understand human experiences through the body and its transformations. Surrealist doctrine questions reality considering imagination the faculty responsible for human existence. Bellmer is primarily interested in the expression of visceral existence, not necessarily in a surrealist redefinition of it. His creatures undergo different mathematical experimentations: permutations, dismembering, multiplication of organs. Bellmer seeks to delve deep into phenomena of the mind, and question the processes that lead to the body feeling, moving, gesticulating spontaneously as a reaction to that which escapes rationality and logic, through rationality and logic. Bellmer uses surrealist elements but his descriptive analysis is subjective and therefore closer to Expressionism.

Bellmer explains aspects of his text and its title in a letter to a friend, *Lettre à Polly*:

Le titre double indique déjà qu’il s’agit d’un but double: Étaler devant le

lecteur qu'il existe une Anatomie de notre corps qui est purement subjective, imaginaire, [...] tirant, parce que non objective, sa nourriture dans des états fiévreux et souvent psycho-pathologiques, le délire sexuel y compris.⁶⁵

There Bellmer also underlines the important role human expression and memory play in creativity. However, the implementation of creativity stems first and foremost from meticulous analysis and synthesis before turning into the aesthetic and the poetic 'en dernier lieu'. Bellmer goes on:

Quant à l'Anatomie ou plutôt aux processus et aux coordonnées de «l'image», il s'agit [...] d'une analyse avec synthèse suivante l'expression humaine sous toutes ses formes, il s'agit du processus de formation poétique, en dernier lieu. Pour que l'on puisse imaginer quelque chose, il faut d'abord que les réservoirs de la mémoire soient pleins.⁶⁶

For Bellmer memory is fed by outside images, observation, and perception – all of those start with one's birth. Bellmer continues that memory often transforms objects that are later remembered into totally different objects because of a similarity in shape, colour, type, flavour. This can be triggered off by chance or 'la trouvaille'. Bellmer also gives importance to hallucinations which he distinguishes as interpretive or pure.

Memory, subjectivity, the imagination, varied and extensive reading, poetry, the experience of others, types of human expression, experimental doll combinations, all come together to form Bellmer's text. Some of the most important readings that shape his text are psychoanalytical (signalled by the *inconscient* in its title), due to a fascination with Jean Lhermitte's clinical observations of patients with bodily hallucinations about the existence of non-existent limbs, as well as the theoretical writings of Freud.

For example in *Les Images du moi*, there are Freudian ideas such as 'la scission du moi' and 'le dedans et le dehors', the huge impact the effects of sexual repression have on puberty, erotic dreams, displacement of desire and

screen memory. These are mixed with other ideas:

Comment décrire en effet, sans l'appauvrir, le plan de situation d'une petite fille assise qui 'rêve', qui se penche – l'épaule gauche haussée, le bras étiré – nonchalamment sur la table, qui cache l'instinctive caresse de son menton entre l'aisselle et la poitrine, la tête ajoutant ainsi son poids au poids de l'épaule et du bras, dont la pression, se réfléchissant dans la contre-pression de sa base d'appui, glisse en diminuant le long de ses muscles, s'attarde autour de la jointure, suit la coude, passe déjà affaiblie, par le poignet légèrement relevé, prend un dernier essor en descendant le long de la main, pour aboutir, entre la pointe de l'index et le dessus de la table, dans l'accent aigu d'un petit grain de sucre. On s'explique assez bien qu'une certaine lassitude d'enfant, le soir, détermine cette attitude, qu'elle joue sur des rêveries de récompense, sur des promesses, plus ou moins comprises, d'ordre affectif et sexuel. L'interdiction du plaisir étant un fait momentanément indiscuté, il s'ensuit la nécessité de nier la cause du conflit, d'effacer l'existence du sexe et de sa zone, de l' 'amputer', la jambe y comprise. L'image en reste néanmoins disponible, prête à se découvrir une signification, une place vacante, à se revêtir ainsi d'une réalité permise. Dès que, par le geste du menton, l'analogie 'sexe-épaule' est établie, les deux images entremêlant leurs contenus en se superposant, le sexe à l'aisselle, la jambe naturellement au bras, le pied à la main, les doigts de pied aux doigts. Il en résulte une bizarre fusion du 'réel' et du 'virtuel', du 'permis', et du 'défendu', des composantes dont l'une gagne vaguement en actualité ce que l'autre cède; et il en résulte un amalgame ambigu de 'perception pure' et de 'représentation pure', au contour irisant par le léger décalage de deux contenus voulus convergents mais opposés. Le choc de la confusion qui s'y mêle, certain 'vertige', paraît être le symptôme et le critère de l'efficacité intérieure, de la probabilité de cette solution. et. dirait-on: il accuse la présence dans l'organisme d'un esprit de contradiction, d'intentions assez irrationnelles, enclin à l'absurde sinon au scandaleux, esprit qui se serait mis en tête de fournir par la réalisation de l'impossible même, les preuves d'une réalité particulière. La pose de cette petite fille assise et ses conditions étaient bien normales. Le jeu du déplacement, à peine sous-entendu par la conscience, ne pouvait devenir visible que dans notre interprétation.⁶⁷

There are reasons for this very long quotation. One reason is that it is Bellmer's first-hand account of the ideas behind the conception of his dolls' bodies; that is, how he views a body. The second reason is that it relates word to (the

visualisation of a body-)image. A third reason is that it illustrates some surrealist elements in Bellmer's writing of the perverse body, such as the joining of opposites, the superposition of two images, Freudian elements including erotic dreams and sexual repression. Fourthly, it gives some explanation as to how Bellmer imagines psycho-physiological phenomena such as the displacement of desire and the flow of sensation from one body-organ or member to another; that is, how he envisages the *imagined* interchangeability of organs and the physiology of the body under certain psychological and emotional conditions. Some idea is also given regarding the fluidity or animation of meaning resulting from the multiple interpretations inspired by an image. There is also mention of the irrational, of a bizarre fusion of the real and the virtual, and of a particular reality. At the same time Bellmer is almost placing himself inside the little girl's psyche in an attempt to translate her emotional and psychological state anatomically – after all one of the text's double titles is *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique*. This Bellmer does in a drawing of the girl (fig.9). The image appears to be an automatic, spontaneous, surrealist process. However, the image explained in the above passage takes place through careful observation, through analytical thinking, and through a subjective interpretation. Another drawing of the little girl (fig.10) is also an example of what Bellmer is trying to illustrate in his passage. Although both drawings appear as hurried lines, Bellmer is expressing his attitude and subjective interpretation of what he sees as the state of mind, or psyche of a little girl. This, of course, may be completely different to what in reality is going on (if anything) in the mind of the girl as Bellmer intuits it expressed through her posture. Bellmer's drawing may appear surrealist; it is nevertheless expressionist.

Alexandre Kojève (whose philosophical lectures on Hegel influenced a whole generation of French thinkers including Breton, Bataille, Aragon, Caillois) writes in *Les Peintures concrètes de Kandinski* (1936) – on Vassily Kandinski's paintings (1866-1944) – that instead of painting an object representing or

represented by some absolute or intrinsic quality, the expressionist artist paints the attitude he has towards that quality of the object. 'Ainsi, par exemple, en peignant un arbre, le peintre peint non pas le Beau pictural de l'arbre, mais le Beau pictural de l'"attitude" qu'il prend vis-à-vis cet arbre. Le tableau expressionniste est donc le plus subjective de tous les tableaux possibles: il "représente" non pas l'objet mais l'attitude subjective provoquée par l'objet.'⁶⁸

The Expressionism described by Kojève is not simply that of an aesthetic movement; it is also philosophical.

In *Du surréalisme considéré dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes* Jean Clair dedicates a chapter to what he calls *L'expressionnisme surréaliste*. Clair puts forward this question:

Une œuvre, qui n'existe que dans la différence entre la question et la réponse, qui évite donc l'instant et l'immédiat, comment peut-elle se reposer sur une doctrine de l'énonciation qui serait celle de l'immédiat et de l'instant: immédiat d'écriture «automatique», d'un regard «sauvage», instantané d'une rencontre fortuite, d'un «hasard objectif», d'un «cadavre exquis»?⁶⁹

With this question Clair raises an important point concerning the classification of artworks; namely, surrealist artworks. Clair is drawing attention to the fact that certain artworks classified as surrealist works can equally partake of any other movement. In the above Clair refers to Expressionism. The main reason Clair gives is that in appearance an artwork may demonstrate qualities belonging to some art movement or school such as Surrealism with qualities of automatism, immediacy and suddenness, while actually employing in its creation and construction opposing qualities that are far removed from immediacy and automatism. Works that are constructed between 'la question et la réponse' belong to a thinking process that is reflective rather than immediate. (That is, such works are more about process than about any resolution.) In other words, there are works of art that are classified surrealist because they delve into

surrealist phenomena, and have been exhibited in Surrealist exhibitions, while in reality they are based on non-surrealist ideas.⁷⁰

Bellmer frequented the Surrealists, was and still is exhibited in Surrealist exhibitions, and considered a Surrealist by many art critics and art historians. What transpires from Bellmer's writings is a keen interest in Surrealism, as well as numerous borrowings from Surrealism when it suits Bellmer. However Bellmer constructs and structures his work through subjective thinking and feelings that he then translates into art objects. In this sense Bellmer's work is largely expressionist since he is constantly trying to transpose and project what lies within him, his own feelings and attitude towards an object (mainly erotic ones along with the effects of experiences such as pain, repressed sexuality, loss of childhood), communicated through specific female bodies: dolls. At the same time the image Bellmer depicts (fig.9), is that of a body expressed as an immediate automatic reaction to inner feelings thus making it look surreal. But there is nothing automatic in Bellmer's written description of his attitude towards what he perceives as a little girl's awareness of her body (figs.9 & 10). There is nothing 'instantané' about the gaze that slowly follows the contours of the little girl's posture; *she* becomes visible through Bellmer's subjective interpretation.

The Expressionism referred to by Kojève, of the depiction of an artist's attitude towards a quality he believes represents an object, is not simply the aesthetic movement that dates between 1900/1905 to 1915 in Germany. It is Expressionism, as Clair points out, that comes to form part of what he calls 'l'expressionisme surréaliste'.⁷¹ Clair's ideas on Expressionism encompass Kojève's statements of a subjective attitude towards an object, and Kojève's discussion of Kandinsky's abstract-expressionist work. In fact Clair takes Kandinsky as one example. Clair explains that Expressionism covers a much wider meaning. 'Née vers 1830, cette théorie serait à situer entre Herder et sa théorie d'une poésie populaire exprimant *spontanément* l'âme des peuples, et

Hegel et son analyse, dans *La Phénoménologie de l'Esprit*, du contenu *immédiat* de la certitude sensible.⁷² Clair considers Expressionism not just an art movement or literary criticism, but also the *Einfühlung* made popular in German Romantic literature by Schlegel, Jean Paul, Novalis. Expressionism was taken up by philosophers and thinkers such as Herder, Hegel, Schlegel, Novalis, according to Clair, to mean a projection of the soul onto the world, 'une tendance panthéiste propre à la nature humaine de ne faire qu'un avec le monde.'⁷³ (Hence the world of marionettes, automatons that populated German Romantic literature and fascinated Bellmer – discussed in chapter one).

Bellmer's writings and art combine inorganic mathematical ideas with organic human figurations. This inorganic-organic combination tends to a particular reality which could be seen as abstract in part, and in part as expressionist. Although the organic-inorganic combination in Bellmer is not a substitute for, nor quite the same as, the animate-inanimate that belong to Surrealism; it is nonetheless an uncanny juxtaposition that can be (simplistically) read as surrealist. The organic-inorganic co-exists along with the animate-inanimate. The inanimate doll is animated through Bellmer's constructions, through an imitation of human form and its stagings, through the contradiction of meanings there, through the juxtaposition of different realities. Bellmer's description of the little girl's pose above is animate-inanimate as image, and combines the inorganic-organic as thinking process and writing turned into image. This is supported by Bellmer's phrase: 'le jeu du déplacement [...] ne pouvait devenir visible que dans notre interprétation'.⁷⁴ That is, abstract play on body limbs and bodily sensations are made into an image through subjective interpretation. Bellmer's views on the real and the virtual illustrated in his writings and art oscillate between aesthetic, philosophical, psycho-analytical theories, and are made up of Expressionism, Surrealism, science, all based on a perverse writing of the body. It is to the perverse in Bellmer's images that I now turn.

La Poupée, 1935-49 (fig.11), is a very disturbing image that makes sacrilege of the sacred by placing it in a profane context. The image depicts a distorted form of Crucifixion turned into a perverse eroticism. The image confirms, to some extent, Waldberg's comment: 'Freed from all theological contexts, [but is it?] the work of Bellmer extends a dialectic of suffering and ecstasy already implicated in the *Lives of Martyrs*, the *Last Judgements*, and the *Temptations*.'⁷⁵ Ecstasy in martyrdom is a form of what Kaja Silverman calls 'Christian masochism,' according to Sue Taylor.⁷⁶ (Christianity is not alone in this.) It is the crucified posture of the doll that evokes this idea of a 'Christian masochism' where Bellmer is concerned. (Also, in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel* Deleuze states that one of Sacher-Masoch's heroic examples is Christ whom the masochist emulates in his need to suffer in order to deserve ecstasy.)

Bellmer uses two pairs of legs that stand fixed to a tree in what looks like a dark forest. One pair stand on the ground, the(ir) other are joined and tied by a rope to a branch. There are two desocketed eyeballs on either side of the branch that could double for breasts, symbols of fertility and sexual difference. The eyes also point to voyeurism and exhibitionism. In the distance behind this scene of *Crucifixion* or *treefixion* stands a jar on a piece of cloth. The jar symbolises both water: baptism, purification; and blood: sacrifice. The cloth wipes. The doll representing a young girl, indicated by her white socks and type of shoes, is reduced to two pairs of limbs. This body-structure built upon lack (of upper torso) and excess (of limbs) turns the doll into a phallic fetish-object. The excess is a substitute for body-wholeness, and a compensation for the lack of part of the body; a metaphor for the missing phallus. In psychoanalytical terms the fetish itself, as well as the doll-duality of girl-phallus are a play on sexual difference and the fear of castration. The limbs also represent body metonyms and a virtual double for a real, inner psychological state of emotional lack or trauma communicated by Bellmer. Bellmer projects this onto his doll as physiological form. It is as if Bellmer feels that the whole body is reducible to

fragments that come to express the disintegration or dissonance that lie within himself. Their doubling expresses the exaggerated intensity with which one feels a painful emotion. The doll's dislocation and *déchirement*, are a reflection of Bellmer's 'moi' ('principe de la sensibilité') that feels pain, sexual repression, a forbidden eroticism, the pleasure in sacrifice, and repentance underlined by the image-narrative. This dislocated doll is formed by Bellmer's second 'moi' image ('principe de la motricité') which projects what lies within Bellmer onto a doll-object seen as reacting to pain through her deformations. This virtual double, *La Poupée*, depicts reduction and a loss of subjectivity. The reduction of humanity and loss of subjectivity are conditions of human degradation as a result of torment and extreme pain.

Bellmer's *La Poupée* is a psychologically charged image through a studied physiological structure. She is Bellmer's illustration of how the experience of violence produces a physical reaction; how it effects the body. At the same time the doll embodies Bellmer's language expressed through art, thus illustrating how the experience of violence effects an individual's language; that is, effects the body that produces language.

This strange doll's body – as indeed all of Bellmer's dolls' bodies – has become visual language speaking of its experience. The dolls embody the effects of suffering; what pain does to the body. Bellmer is constructing a body representing what he calls a third reality. 'L'opposition est nécessaire afin que les choses soient et que se forme une réalité troisième.'⁷⁷ The reality of the body is its intact form, the experience of violence is a second reality due to the outside. The synthesis between the two realities produces Bellmer's third reality as virtual image of what lies within the body illustrating the effects of violence through it. This third reality is a dynamic state depicting an individual undergoing a transformation because of some powerful experience. It describes the process of an inner metamorphosis between what the individual was before the experience and what he will become after it. That is, it describes a frozen

moment in the process of experience through the body. To give this third reality – expressed by the doll's body – credibility, or to underline that the doll is reacting to some horrific experience, Bellmer stages violent scenes around his dolls offering some narrative to the spectator. This narrative I read as masochistic rather than sadistic. The main reason for this is that Bellmer shows pain and its degrading effects on the human being in suspension, and aesthetically. The pain is depicted as being due to the violence and cruel indifference of the outside world. If there is an ambiguity between sadism and masochism, this lies in Bellmer's showing of a hostile world through his narrative (not because he is sadistic but because to him this is true), made stronger because of the vulnerability of the chosen model-victim: a female childhood figure, a defenceless doll.

In his doll-constructions Bellmer relives torment for a purpose: to come to terms with suffering and the world, for salvation (some relief) from this world through an understanding of pain. In addition, Bellmer also seeks to understand – not only in this image but in most of his images – how erotic experience is still possible under hardship. In this respect there is nothing destructive about the image, rather it illustrates how Bellmer takes a masochistic pleasure in reliving pain. This also follows from Deleuze's analysis of masochism with regard to the care for detail in Bellmer's fetishist-dressing up of the doll, voyeurism, photographing the image as a souvenir-*memento mori* of a real event, as well as finally touching up the photograph. (Bellmer hand-colours parts of the final photographs.) All of these actions require time, and are a play on the suspension from achieving an aim. It is as if Bellmer is recognising that to deserve love, and/or erotic ecstasy in such a cruel unjust world one has to suffer, to pay a price.

The image of the doll made up of double limbs recurs in many of Bellmer's *La Poupée* series, as well as other images of doll-tree-Crucifixions. In *Petite Anatomie de l'Inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'Image* Bellmer has this

to say about his reason for doubling limbs, as well as other organs of the body, and substituting one for another:

D'après les vues précédantes, on se demande, si le plaisir du bras de stimuler la jambe n'équivaut pas le plaisir de la jambe de jouer le rôle du bras, on se demande si la fausse identité établie entre bras et jambe, entre sexe et aisselle, entre œil et main, nez et talon, ne serait pas une réciprocité. Ainsi voudrait-on se figurer comme un axe de réversibilité des foyers réel et virtuel d'une excitation, axe qui se tracerait par endroits, même dans le domaine de l'anatomie métrique, qui, vu l'affinité oppositionnelle des seins et des fesses par exemple, de la bouche et du sexe, passerait, horizontal, à la hauteur du nombril.⁷⁸

Bellmer investigates the equivalence of bodily sensations in areas of the body with others. That is, Bellmer questions whether it is possible to substitute, for example, a nose for a heel, an arm for a leg, and in spite of their false repositioning obtain reciprocal feelings from either as if they had not moved from their original positions. Bellmer argues that due to body-symmetry it should not make much difference with which part the body ends, and where it is placed since sensation has to always pass through the same centre: 'le nombril'. Where sensation starts and where it ends are interchangeable and irrelevant; what is of relevance is the connecting point through which everything flows.⁷⁹ This strange way of thinking the body is one that Bellmer practices in his art, and comes close to scientific theories that Bellmer most probably applies in his aesthetic forms. (In electrical processes, for example, energy is conserved irrespective of its direction so long as it is produced from the same fixed point, what might change is the polarity of the energy; that is, negative into positive or vice-versa.)

Obviously, Bellmer's images are not just science transformed into aesthetics. The joining of opposites in his images, such as the sacred and the profane in fig. 11, the animate with the inanimate evoking the uncanny (part of Breton's definition of compulsive beauty), emphasize the Surrealism of the image.⁸⁰ Bellmer employs ideas that are surrealist mixed with quasi-geometric

abstraction in the actual doll-structure and in the fabrication of its body. This is underlined in the above passage through organ substitutions and phrases such as: ‘un axe de réversibilité’, ‘une anatomie métrique’, as well as by other phrases Bellmer uses in *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* such as: ‘une affirmation expérimentale et nettement géométrisée,’⁸¹ ‘Comme le jardinier oblige le buis à vivre sous forme de boule, de cône, de cube, l'homme impose à l'image de la femme ses élémentaires certitudes, les habitudes géométriques et algébriques de sa pensée.’⁸² (See figs.10 & 12). Within this geometry Bellmer implements the organic, the poetic, expressionist *Einfühlung*; that is, a fusion of body-parts for *jouissance*: ‘le plaisir de bras de stimuler la jambe’, ‘le plaisir de la jambe de jouer le rôle du bras’, which is also theatrical, irrational, and surreal. Bellmer gives his assessment of the body image:

‘L'image' serait donc la synthèse de deux images actualisées simultanément. Le degré de ressemblance, de dissemblance ou d'antagonisme entre ces deux images constitue probablement le degré d'intensité, de réalité et la valeur de ‘choc’ de l'image résultante, c'est-à-dire de l'image ‘perception- représentation’.⁸³

Aesthetically ‘l'image perception-représentation’: the doll alone or staged is the result of two images. One is organic and reads as either surrealist (animate-inanimate) or expressionist (attitude of the artist towards a particular quality – here eroticism – of the body: his and that of the other) depending on the spectator's interpretation. The other image is inorganic and based on science: geometry and imagined energy flow. The tension stemming from the discrepancy between the two: organic and inorganic, according to Bellmer, produces the degree of strangeness or shock the visual image imparts. This can also be read as surreal. However in reality the final image-product is based upon Bellmer's subjective thinking and feelings. This image opens up a space for psychoanalytical interpretation. ‘L'image perception-représentation’ becomes

Bellmer's virtual image of inner states and the psyche. This reinforces the concept explored earlier that Bellmer's visual work results from two 'images de moi'. The extent of the disturbance provoked by the visual image; that is, its capacity to shock, in this case, depends upon the degree of intensity (the extent of personal trauma, pain) the two 'images de moi' made up of 'sensibilité' and 'motricité' undergo. This then gets reflected and projected onto the outside work of art: the virtual image of the real 'images de moi', Bellmer's 'double hallucinatoire'.

In this section I first attempted to situate Bellmer's work aesthetically. I came to the conclusion that behind the aesthetic ideas – Surrealism, Expressionism, geometric-abstraction – comprising Bellmer's work lie a rational analysis and synthesis that point to a calculated perversion rather than to a spontaneous irrationality. Bellmer deliberately draws an image of perversion where pleasure (an arm has in simulating a leg) is used to illustrate pain (through bodily dislocations and distortions), as well as mental aberrations via organ-confusions (imagining one's arm is a leg, etc.). The doll-images Bellmer projects are images of pain, of a fragmented and incomplete body in search of an identity and of fulfillment that is forever in suspension and unattainable. In an initial attempt to define perversion in Bellmer's staged images I considered that perversion there is closer to Deleuze's analysis of masochism. This is because of the studied experimentation involved in creating these images, their aesthetic content, and the existence of some moral purpose rather than mere destruction. Bellmer uses perversion to show a raw human state and empathise with it. In addition, Bellmer's dolls are a virtual reflection of his real 'images du moi', rather than an illustration of Bellmer's vindictive reaction inflicted on feminine creature-creations. However, Bellmer's work is often seen as oscillating between some sort of sadism and masochism. I discuss this more in the next section where I look at different views on Bellmer's work, and investigate his images further in order to establish which perversion dominates his work.

Reality, Sadism, and Masochism in Bellmer's Theatre of the Perverse Body

Sadomasochism in Bellmer's work has been discussed and commented upon repeatedly by several authors including Dourthe, Taylor, Lichtenstein, Masson. Most of these texts point to Bellmer's affiliation with Sade's writings and Bellmer's sadism. Dourthe comments on the initial unease that Bellmer felt towards Sade's texts.

Cette fascination pour l'écrivain relève d'abord d'une intuition: [...] naît de l'attirance pour la liberté du désir et de la jubilation que lui procure l'emportement des écrits du marquis. Elle ne découle pas d'une lecture scientifique de la grammaire sadienne (Bellmer éprouve de réelles difficultés à lire Sade). Et puis il n'a pas à digérer l'entreprise dans son intégralité. Il en reprends la lecture de temps à autre [...] pour s'appuyer sur elle, alors qu'il entreprend *sa propre critique du corps social*. Puis peu à peu, Bellmer s'intéressera à la saturation du corps, au code érotique sadien et à sa défiguration (le mot est de Barthes).⁸⁴

Dourthe also comments on how Bellmer takes up a Sadean philosophy of the equivalence of different body-parts in his own work. Bellmer illustrates this in a portrait of Sade, 1961 (fig.13). (Bellmer reads Sade in the mid-30s.) However, the important point Dourthe's statement puts forward is that Bellmer 'entreprend *sa propre critique du corps social*'. This is largely what I am trying to show in this chapter. Bellmer may seem to adhere to some ideological aesthetic (Surrealism) or borrow elements from certain art-movements and thinkers, his thinking and work are nevertheless independent and unique with a complexity that almost defies definition as illustrated by the writers' comments below.

For instance, Taylor writes: 'the presumption of a masochistic subtext to the abuses depicted in Bellmer's photographs is supported by the artist's interest in

scenes of Christian martyrdom where agonised figures are represented as models for emulation and identification.⁸⁵ She considers that there is a latent masochism behind Bellmer's sadistic images of violence and cites Silverman's comment in *Male Subjectivity in the Margins*: 'libidinal deviations always represent a "politics" of sorts', concluding that 'the implications of Bellmer's politics of perversion are at best ambiguous.'⁸⁶ The links with politics: Nazism, fascism in Bellmer's work, as well as with perversion in terms of sado-masochism are also made by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Lichtenstein.

In *Claude Cahun and Dora Maar: By way of an Introduction*, Krauss discusses Bataille's concepts of 'alteration' and 'formlessness' that express 'a lowering or debasing of the representation of the *specifically* human form', which was often done through 'self-mutilation' that was 'not the creation of form but the defacement of it in a gesture that was simultaneously sacred and scatological'.⁸⁷ Krauss does not directly link this to Bellmer but it is the direction her chapter takes in the discussion of Cahun and Maar's photographs and the(ir) construction of the surrealist body. Krauss's discussion leads onto a 'parallel of recognition' between the 'phallic character' of Maar's photographs of female legs and Bellmer's *Poupées*; particularly his four-legged dolls, 'not simply because of their own drive to construct the feminine body as tumescent or erectile, but more particularly to cast it mantis-like, as nothing but legs and in that guise as profoundly threatening: the very image of Medusa in all its castrative menace'.⁸⁸ Since, as Krauss suggests, the Medusa's task is to attack the male ego and shatter it, it follows that 'an alliance with the Medusa is thus not an attack on women, but an assault on a viewer assumed to be male and an award to his fantasies of their worst fears'.⁸⁹ Krauss then cites Foster who is of the opinion that Bellmer creates these double-legged *Poupées* as an attack on the 'Nazi subject'. These comments ring true where Bellmer's father as the intended spectator was concerned. In general, the dismembered mutilated dolls have been seen as an attack on the father and on the 'perfect' German Aryan body

promoted by Hitler. These dismembered dolls did certainly start out as an act of revolt, as I discussed in chapter one – but that is not all that Bellmer's images represent nor is it their sole *raison d'être* as I explain further on. Certainly, the allusion to a hostile sadistic world in his staged images can be seen as a reference to Nazism, since many of these images are made during Hitler's *Reich*.

In *Cindy Sherman: Untitled* Krauss returns to Bellmer. Krauss likens and connects Bellmer to Sherman as another candidate for 'virulent criticism' from discontented feminists. 'This artist is Hans Bellmer who spent the years 1934-49, that is from the rise of the Nazi Party through World War II, in Germany making [...] the series title *La Poupée*. Photographs of dolls that he assembled out of dismountable parts, placing the newly configured body fragments in various situations, mainly domestic, in an early version of installation art, and then disassembling them to start anew, Bellmer's work has been accused of endlessly staging scenes of rape and of violence on the bodies of women.'⁹⁰ Furthermore, Krauss affirms that 'to make one's art by means of photographing suggestively positioned dolls is, itself, a decision that speaks volumes. Sherman can continue to call these works *Untitled* but they nevertheless produce their own reading through a connection to the *Poupées* of Hans Bellmer'.⁹¹ Contrary to Krauss, I think each artist can be read separately (I doubt that Sherman was staging her art with Bellmer solely in mind). Sherman's images start out as *Film Stills* of self-portraits and turn into 'Sex Dolls'. One example is the 'Sex Doll', 1992 (fig.14), depicting an image of violence done to the female-doll body and rape. (A discussion of Sherman's work is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say her images do not exactly originate from the same ideas as Bellmer's images.) A reading of Bellmer's work gives a deeper insight into his thinking and by extension into his visual art when seen within the context of his writings, his time, and the world around him. Bellmer creates his own self-sufficient world, reading him in comparison to Cahun or Sherman gives his (and their) images a somewhat specific limited reading.

Returning to Bellmer's four-legged dolls (that Krauss talks about in relation to Sherman) of which *La Poupée*, 1935 (fig.15), is one example: Krauss sees the legs as 'swastika-like in their configuration', as a 'Nazi emblem,' one 'in which the body is experienced as threatened and invaded by dismembering objects'.⁹² Krauss agrees with Foster in 'seeing Bellmer's project as one that submits itself to sadomasochistic fantasies in order to explore the convulsive tension between binding and shattering': Bellmer's work is complicit with fascism "in order to expose it better" Foster writes, "for in the *poupées* this fear of the destructive and the defusive is made manifest and reflexive, as is the attempt to overcome in it violence against the feminine other – that is a scandal but also a lesson of the dolls".⁹³ Foster's comment on Bellmer's complicity with fascism underlines the ambiguity in Bellmer's work, since complicity implies tacit agreement, yet Bellmer's aim is treacherous: 'to expose it better'. Reading them politically Bellmer's images do expose fascism but are not necessarily complicit; their repulsive and disturbing scenes are a form of revolt *per se* towards what is going on. That is, the images contain their own social criticism both as exposure and as negative comment.

The important issue that comes to light from the views above is the agreement that Bellmer's doll-images are images of pain and revolt. Bellmer's deformed dolls staged in perverse scenes then photographed represent pain that is relived twice: once through the aesthetic object, then again as frozen memory via the photograph-object. 'The immobility of a statue is implicitly conceived as the state of a living being frozen into immobility in an infinite pain; while the moving image [cinema] is a dead immobile object which magically comes alive [...]; the dead image is a still, a "freeze-frame" – that is a stiffened movement.'⁹⁴ Bellmer creates dolls, immobile creatures, distorting their bodies into some imaginary movement animating them through his stagings, then freezing them as image. Foster, Krauss, Taylor, see these images in sadomasochistic terms, as political revolt and as violence against the feminine

other.

In *Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus*, 2001, Foster reviews his ideas:

In *Compulsive Beauty* (1993) I argued that Bellmer performed this regression as an act of defiance against his Nazi father, as a gesture of assault on an all phallic authority – parental and political. Here, as the psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel has remarked, the perversion of the dolls is precisely a *père-version*, a turning away from the father, a disavowal of his genital monopoly and a challenge to his pre-emptive law through ‘an erosion of the double difference between the sexes and the generations’. This erosion is so scandalous because it exposes an archaic order of the drives, ‘the indifferentiated anal-sadistic dimension’ and it is this order of the drives, with its logic of part-objects, that Bellmer reveals [...] underneath the broken surface of the surrealist fetish. [...]. If the first doll suggests a breakdown of the fetish with its fixed desire, the second doll suggests a release of the part-object with its wild associations – again, legs which are breasts, which are buttocks, which are head.⁹⁵

Foster asserts previous ideas about Bellmer’s dolls as a revolt against the father, authority, and fascism, but adds that this aversion toward the father: ‘*père-version*’ has further reaching consequences. In creating dolls Bellmer is not only revolting but (more significantly) he is also trying to dethrone the father’s authority by mocking his begetting abilities. That is, Bellmer’s dolls are not just political revolt they are also a psychological manifestations of unease, fear, disgust, pain where his own origins are concerned. As a creator of dolls, Bellmer is demonstrating his father’s failure in himself: his son. The very fragmentation of the dolls suggests the breakdown of the compensatory (fetish) object, of the inability to reach a state of sexual stability (life instinct) that ties in with a stable paternal order as giver of life.

Instead of the doll as just a figure of revolt and a mocking of the father through representations of the female figure – suggested by the authors above and which I also briefly discussed in my first chapter – I consider Bellmer’s

dolls a representation and embodiment of several other elements. These include Bellmer's virtual image that comes from his 'images du moi'; that is, an outside-double for an inner state of feeling and reaction. They also represent alter-egos for Bellmer's experience of violence, and his feminine other. In addition the dolls are a sign of sexual difference: a fetishist substitute-compensation for the phallus. They encompass sexual fear and embody the masochistic ego, as I will argue further on.

For the major part the dolls represent Bellmer's psychological state: vulnerability, unstable identity, pain, shown in Bellmer's choice of their feminine form and little-girl body. In this sense they can be taken as representations of Bellmer's feminine other, or a sexual state. Freud states that: 'the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine", whose meaning seems so unambiguous to ordinary people, are among the most confused that occur in science. It is possible to distinguish at least *three* uses. "Masculine" and "feminine" are used in the sense of *activity* and *passivity*, sometimes in a *biological*, and sometimes again, in a *sociological* sense.'⁹⁶ According to Freud the first sense of activity and passivity is the essential one and most used in psychoanalysis; the libido is always active-masculine irrespective of which sex, 'even if it has a passive aim in view' (passive for Freud means the feminine).⁹⁷ The biological sense is easily determined by physiology: 'the presence of spermatozoa and ova' and 'by the functions proceeding from them.'⁹⁸ The sociological sense 'receives its connotation from the observation of actually existing masculine and feminine individuals. Such observation shows that in human beings pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in a psychological or a biological sense.'⁹⁹ This sociological sense comprises issues of social status and position. For example a monarch or ruling group are in an active (therefore masculine) position with respect to the governed passive (feminine) subjects. Likewise the colonialist is active-masculine in relation to the colonised who are passive-feminine – the relation of adults to children is

also of such an order.

Bellmer's doll takes on the biological sense as a physiological-image. Its feminine physiology is childlike pointing to (libidinal) passivity, and a sociological vulnerability. The feminine-physiology of the body structure has been tampered with and reconstructed by Bellmer in such a way that could agree with Bataille's alteration and formlessness. The latter is defined by Krauss (cited above) as 'not the creation of form but a defacement of it in a gesture [that is] sacred and scatological'. Except that Bellmer's alteration is not a defacement of form but its recreation; it remains primarily in the feminine, a feminine disfigured to express vulnerability and torment rather than to detract from expression. Reading the body-image as a defacement of form brings up sadism with its 'scatological' gestures because defacement is a negative act and its repetition tends towards total negation (*négation* not *dénégation*). However, the 'sacred' in gesture would then point to a sadism reversing into masochism; that is, the image becomes one of sadomasochism or one with a 'subtle masochistic subtext,' as suggested by Krauss and others. Bellmer alters the female form not to deny or deface it; it is recognisable. Bellmer insists on its femininity: a metaphor for (his) fragility and erotic desire. His alterations are made up of permutations, compressions, deformation, dismembering, in order to add meanings to the doll; to make it express an inner state, a psychological situation, a personal experience from 'les réservoirs de la mémoire,' as suggested by Bellmer in his letter to Polly (p.96). The doll-images are an experience of violence expressed as perverse eroticism. Actually Bellmer's need to alter form is not necessarily sacred nor scatological (such meanings come later, are secondary, and depend on interpretation). It is first and foremost analytical and seeks to express viscerally the effects of experience both psychologically and physiologically through a hallucinatory body double.

Returning to the doll-image that Krauss and Foster call swastika (fig.15): this is made up of Bellmer's four-legged doll and looks like a psychological effigy of

a body bent by the burden of domestic chores – or like a wizened version of Louise Bourgeois's giant spider-sculptures with the lace shelf-cloths underlining a (female) spider activity of spinning. (In German, spider is feminine: *die Spinne*, and weaving, spinning, turning, rotating, telling tales is *spinnen*.) Irrespective of how the image is read, it primarily represents a virtual image of Bellmer's doubling of 'moi' and another permutation-experimentation with the body. It is a doubling built upon 'two lacks' and reads simultaneously as object of desire and object of fear; that is as 'fetish and phobic object,' in Slavoj Žižek's words.¹⁰⁰

In *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes* Žižek discusses the 'fetish and phobic object' through a reading of Lacan. There Žižek explains how a sought-after object – the fetish can suddenly turn into its dreaded other: a phobic object. Following Žižek's argument, the fetish is a 'stand-in for castration'; that is, a substitute or compensatory object (as discussed before) that maintains the flow of desire for the 'Other'. However the fetish, in Žižek's view, is not just a compensatory-substitute for the castrated 'Other'; it also stands for the lack in the subject. The subject's lack lies in an initial belief in the possibility of castration. The need to deny or negate possible castration becomes reflected as the 'Other's inaccessible depth'; that is, as the 'Other' not possessing any lack or depth. The fetish then provides a substitute or compensation for both the subject's and the other's lack; that is, for the premonition of castration in the sexual relation with the other and the other's missing phallus. The fetish therefore absorbs fear and keeps desire going. (Castration does not have to be literally physical it also includes the emotional. For instance when an individual feels that through a sexual relation with an overpowering other he or she will become powerless. The fetish here acts as a bridge.) Behind this apparent continuity of desire through fetishist staging lies an ambiguous situation: in the very staging of the denial or disavowal of castration is a perverse admission of its existence. According to Žižek 'symbolic castration' (fetishist staging) is what

the subject is really after since it enables the subject to break free from the mother (representing strong emotional ties) and seek desire elsewhere. This is why when 'the fetishist staging of castration' falls apart, when the subject fully realises this is a theatrical untruth, it turns into what the subject most dreads: the non-castrated overpowering female. The fetish object then turns into phobic object failing to compensate for both lacks thus stressing castration rather than denying or negating it. The phobic object augments the fear towards the 'Other' who now is seen as dangerous; capable of castrating the subject through her possession of him. The phobic object does not absorb any fear of the desired 'Other' by displacing it onto itself like the fetish. It reflects the fear back onto this 'Other' intensifying the fear of castration and rendering the desiring subject impotent – or petrified.¹⁰¹

Reading Bellmer's four legged-doll, (fig.15), in Krauss's terms as 'the gaze of Medusa' and 'harbinger of horror'; that is, as a phobic object of fear, comes close to Krauss's (and Foster's initial) idea of Bellmer's image as a swastika. There the body becomes emblematic of a Nazi regime, of an authoritarian father. In short it becomes a phobic object signalling the double castration of the subject. One is based on how the subject views himself compared to the other/s: as impotent, for instance. Whereas the other is based on how he imagines his body is seen by the other/s; as monstrous, undesirable. In Krauss's words: 'The failure to observe the configuration of the swastika as the ground of reflectiveness from which Bellmer can strike against the father's armor is a failure that allows the semantic naiveté of a description of the work's signified: as a victim of rape.'¹⁰²

The swastika-phobia object may be one way of reading the image but it is neither essential nor the only reading of the image, nor is that to give a reading of the object as purely a 'victim of rape'-image. It might contain these elements read from Krauss's perspective. What is important is the fact that the image is constructed (as are several of Bellmer's dolls) around a repetitive image of 'two lacks'. One lack is on the elemental level of body-structure

where each pair of legs reflects the other pair and its respective lacking upper body. This represents a physical blockage (metaphorically related to an emotional blockage) through the inability of the body to develop beyond a certain point; that is, it can only repeat itself beyond that point: it keeps reliving pain, it stammers. This is one form of castration and in this sense the doll's body can be read as a phobic object or as lack in the subject. Another lack is that represented by the whole structure as a phallic-object – not to be read as a swastika. In this sense it becomes a fetish-object that facilitates the flow of desire by absorbing the fear of castration. (Bellmer overcomes emotional fear by displacing it into his doll-objects.) One reason for not reading Bellmer's image purely as a swastika, or a phobic object, but as a fetish is that not all of Bellmer's dolls – as pairs of legs – are based on a swastika configuration (although there are a few other 'swastika-images') but are constructed to relieve inner pain, to produce erotic feelings – as he explains in *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*.

Another four legged-doll based on a 'swastika with toupie' is fig.16. Again this *Poupée* can be seen as a phobic object of horror doubling into a fetish. The tension given off by the image lies between its representing a horror-stricken aversion for sexual relations and a clinical object, depending on how one reads the image.¹⁰³ Nevertheless it is an image that comes out of pain. It is also a schizophrenic image of a split in the 'images du moi' staged as an 'opposition between' the phobic object that admits castration, and the fetish that disavows castration, and ends in a third reality-image suggested by the doll-object within the narrative-context. That is, this third reality-image represents 'that of symbolic castration [...] desperately staged by the perverse subject' because of its experience of fear and pain: sexual, emotional.¹⁰⁴

La Poupée, 1935 (fig.16), is interesting because it evokes Bellmer's love for playing on words and anagrams. The suspended pairs of legs can be seen as a giant spider: *Spinne* and the spinning top spins: *spinnt* which also

means to spin a web (of evil?), fabricate, tell a tale, insanity. There are also hints of E.T.A Hoffmann's Olympia spinning before she explodes and her limbs get fragmented and are thrown upwards in Jacques Offenbach, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. The spinning top was an object that particularly fascinated Bellmer and he refers to it in his writings. Bellmer made several drawings of it alone, with dolls, or with little girls. A sculpture of it made in 1938 was lost and he remade it in 1968, *La Toupie* (fig.17). Taken out of image and frozen into a three-dimensional work *La Toupie* can be seen as a surrealist 'isolation of a central image'.¹⁰⁵ This endows it with an iconic value (childhood), stressing the importance of a metonym or part that comes to represent the truth, or the real state of affairs of a whole system or structure. *La Toupie* can be read as a fetish-object because it is made up of body parts signifying sexual difference. It can be read as childhood memory of childhood objects consisting of a top and maternal breasts. It can be read as a psychological development – a spiralling of time – from childhood into adulthood and the discovery of sexuality – a state through which all individuals must go through. This latter state represents an experience of sexuality, among others. As I mentioned earlier, experience embodied by artworks constitutes what Bellmer calls a third reality. Bellmer's third reality is a synthesis of two realities. One reality is the subject's own before contact with the outside world, the second is the outside reality that imposes itself on the subject's reality modifying and transforming it into a third reality (within the subject). The subject's initial reality (for example: childhood innocence and play) turns into a third reality because of contact with the other becoming for example a sexual experience. Bellmer's third reality illustrates an experience that is ongoing, an individual is in a state of experiencing.

Reading *La Toupie* as an exaggerated body-metonym or psychological fragment for the whole body pinpoints the message the artist wants to get across; his truth:

Hegel's point is the exact opposite of the standard wisdom: the harmonious balanced totality is not the 'truth' within which particular exaggerations, deprived of their excess, must find their proper place; on the contrary, *the excess of 'exaggeration' is the truth that undermines the falsity of the balanced totality*. [...]. In the choice between the Whole and its Part, one has to choose the Part and elevate it to the Principle of the Whole – this 'crazy' reversal introduces the dynamics of process. One can also put it in terms of 'being' and 'event', of the subject *qua* event, [...]: the subject emerges in the event of 'exaggeration', when a part exceeds its limited place and explodes the constraints of balanced totality. [...]. Hegelian totality is not an organic Whole within which each element sticks to its limited place, but a 'crazy' totality in which a position reverts to its Other in the very movement of its excessive exaggeration – the dialectical 'link' of partial elements emerges only through their 'exaggeration'. [...]. The Hegelian point to be made is not that each predicate has a descriptive as well as an argumentative aspect, but that the descriptive aspect itself emerges when an argumentative attitude is brought to its extreme, 'reified', and thus self-negates.¹⁰⁶

In the above passage, Žižek explains Hegel's method for obtaining truth from a given totality. To obtain truth about a situation, or subject, a relevant element within the totality is singled out and grossly exaggerated. This reverses the harmonic order of whatever totality one is looking at, showing it to be false and unrealistic on the one hand. On the other hand, the exaggerated element becomes the totality; that is, it represents the true essence of this totality. 'One has to choose the Part and elevate it to the Whole – this "crazy" reversal introduces the dynamics of process.' This point of the part as a substitute for the whole can show how a given situation evolves: the flow of history, the making of art, the transformation-process of human psyche through experience, biology, sexuality, memory. This is done through the isolation of a chosen fragment from a given situation that then comes to encompass the truth about the whole situation. These points are illustrated in *La Toupie*, for example. There Bellmer is simultaneously putting forward several points by isolating a figure from childhood with its memories, and charging it with excessive organic

exaggeration: breasts that transform it into an erotic object. For example, Bellmer is metaphorically describing a memory from childhood. He describes the mother and pleasure through the top that symbolises childhood, and is made up of breasts representing the mother. In this sense *La Toupie* is an art object that metaphorically represents the child's first erotogenic experience as abundant pleasure. Childhood memories are blown out of proportion simply indicating that everything an adult experiences later in life originated from there. In the image erotogenic pleasure and its nutritional object are also transformed into sexual pleasure and its sex object. At the same time the cone-shaped top versus the multiple breasts is a dual object containing feminine and masculine elements. It is also made up of Freud's dual poles of active and passive, since in its initial state it is passive until it is activated to rotate or spin. It is a fetish (rather than a phobic object) because in spite of signalling sexual difference it is an object of desire, if only for its name *La Toupie* which suggests childhood's realm. In one sense it is expressionist in that it reflects Bellmer's attitude towards childhood and the consequent discovery of sexual difference. In addition, its overtly fixed-explosive structure turns it into a surrealist object *par excellence*, since it is also veiled-erotic through its (innocent) name and (erotic) structure, as well as magical-circumstantial, through its evocation of childhood. It is repetitive; it spins, its breasts are multiplied. It is also the found object of childhood. *La Toupie* becomes an image of Clair's *Surrealist Expressionism*. In fact *La Toupie* generates many readings including the political if one wants to look at it from such a perspective (following Krauss's and Foster's line of thinking); that is, as an automated organ-producing machine, as a grinding political-machine that fragments humanity and reifies it.

In this section I discussed how Bellmer's images of body-violence are often analysed in Freudian terms, with an emphasis on sadism, by different writers (including those cited above). I prefer to see them as images of masochism, as I have suggested and will explore further in subsequent sections. As I explained

earlier, Freud speaks of a secondary masochism coming out of sadism; that is, a sadism that either reverses into masochism, or is projected back onto the sadistic subject turning into masochism. Deleuze acknowledges Freud's secondary masochism coming out of sadism while differentiating between it and what he considers to be genuine masochism. Deleuze distinguishes between sadism proper, as defined by Freud, and the sadism linked to masochism which Deleuze calls pseudo-sadism; that is, a masochistic sadism. For Deleuze pseudo-sadism is not real sadism; it is aggression, a violence with the same direction of sadism that of inflicting pain on the other, but not for the same reasons. Of the writers cited above, Masson briefly mentions Deleuze's essay while Lichtenstein affords it limited space.¹⁰⁷ She delves briefly into the masochistic dimensions of Bellmer's work: 'as [...] Deleuze describes it, masochism involves a contract in which suspense is created mutually by using aesthetic and dramatic devices.'¹⁰⁸ Lichtenstein goes on: 'sadism often provides a substitute for a psychic breakdown [...] it may also serve to grant a person an illusory sense of self. To represent a sadomasochistic dynamic [...] can be a way of displacing real experiences of abandonment and loss. Such a dynamic is set up and played in a number of ways in Bellmer's photographs.'¹⁰⁹

The discussion of Deleuze's ideas of sadism and masochism as two completely different structures and a comparison of these with Bellmer's images, to the best of my knowledge, has not been done. Deleuze's theory is important in Bellmer's case because it provides another meaningful reading to his staged scenes by exploring the power of the images through the philosophy of structure (irrespective of the artist's precise intentions). Deleuze's theory is largely based on the literary imagination of writers' treatment of different versions of perversion and the body, not just from psychoanalytical clinical studies. In particular Bellmer's 'images du moi', 'scission du moi,' and visual images are given deeper meaning seen through Deleuze's views on 'surmoi sadique et moi masochiste'. It is to a discussion of these that I now turn.

The Doll between Masculine and Feminine: Fetish, Super-ego and Masochistic Ego

Foster asks – as Freud had argued – whether there is masochism hidden within the sadistic subject, specifically where Bellmer was concerned: ‘might this be true of Bellmer – or of the subject he projects here?’ and answers:

The scenarios of the dolls do stage a sadistic attack that seems to go beyond the female object to rebound on the male subject [...]. One way [...] is to posit a masochistic subtext in the sadistic stagings of the *poupées* [...]. It is this difficult relay between sadism and masochism, the erotogenic and the destructive, that the *poupées* evoke for me. For in his sadistic scenes Bellmer leaves behind masochistic traces; in his erotic manipulation of the dolls he explores a destructive impulse that is also self-destructive. In this way the dolls may go inside sadistic mastery to the point where the subject confronts its greatest fear: its own fragmentation and disintegration.¹¹⁰

Foster is linking sadistic stagings with a masochistic subtext. He considers Bellmer’s images sadistic – violence on the dolls – while allowing for the existence of a latent masochistic representation which hides what Foster describes as the violence Bellmer dreads the most. Put in simple terms: the very violence done to the dolls Foster considers (an interpretation of) sadism since pain is inflicted on the doll by its author-creator. But as I argued earlier, I see the pain not inflicted by the author on the doll but by an outside world on the author communicated through his dolls, and then reproduced as staged narrative. As Foster states (above): ‘Bellmer leaves behind masochistic traces [...] he explores a destructive impulse that is also self-destructive’. This reading returns us to sadism since destruction – whether of the self or other – is sadistic or sadomasochistic.

Foster’s statement highlights the problem (other authors, mentioned above, also have) of defining perversion and its reasons in Bellmer’s art. Apart from his

drawings Bellmer's art consists of doll-sculptures alone and of doll-sculptures staged and photographed in violent scenes. The doll-sculptures are defined via Bellmer's writings as his inner images' virtual other. They are alter-egos and psycho-physiological doubles of Bellmer's real inner state based on his (fetish-) principle of perversion. The staged images are what most of the above authors including Foster try to explain mainly in terms of sadomasochism. As I explained earlier, I consider that Bellmer's staged narrative is a fictive metaphor for a violent reality depicted by him to further emphasize the reasons for his dolls' deformations and fragmentations. In other words, through his disturbing and violent scenes Bellmer places his dolls in context; reacting to this context. That is, through these contexts Bellmer shows why the dolls are so broken and tormented.

Bellmer's theatre of the perverse body; his staged narrative forms his fantasy or dream-world. Deciphering these images helps define the type of perversion Bellmer actually fantasizes about. This in turn lends some insight about the artist himself; the workings of his mind and his eventual relation with Zürn. Having discussed different opinions on Bellmer's work in the previous section I would like to return to Deleuze in connection with Bellmer's work for further interpretation. I therefore continue with the discussion I started in an earlier section: 'Masochism and Sadism: Between Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Art' (p. 83), in order to decipher this staged narrative as masochism and not sadism.

As I established earlier masochism is about inflicting pain but not to destruct (either the self or other); it uses pain to suspend pleasure, erotic gratification in order to preserve these (as memory for one) along with its protagonists. Masochism like sadism is based on aggression but with completely separate aims. Here I continue arguing that Bellmer's images are largely masochistic, and that any subtext they represent is an expression of sadistic aggression (in direction), which is not real sadism. My reasoning depends on the

aim and structure of the perversion rather than on the direction of pain. That is, it is irrelevant whether the subject enjoys inflicting pain or having pain inflicted on the self or not, what are important are the why and how. I will do this first by looking at an example through more of Deleuze's ideas; and then I investigate these issues in Bellmer's relation with Zürn in the next section.

In my earlier section: 'Masochism and Sadism: Between Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Art', I discussed sadism and masochism and the differences between these, philosophically and aesthetically from a reading of Deleuze. Summing up Deleuze's argument, each perversion has its own exclusive properties that prevent one from turning into the other. Sadism is erotic pleasure obtained through inflicting physical and sexual pain on others. Among its main characteristics is immediacy. The sadist seeks any victim (the greater the number the better), aims at total destruction, follows no specific rules. Masochism is based upon desired pain inflicted on the subject by an erotic other of specific qualifications. Masochism requires a contract, follows aesthetic detail, bases sexual pleasure upon delay and suspension.

In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel* Deleuze goes on to state that the most telling difference between sadism and masochism lies in how the ego behaves in each case once it splits (into a sadistic super-ego and a masochistic ego – Freud's concepts which I discussed in connection to the castration fantasy, p.75.) In my earlier section, I described the conditions that define each perversion – from the outside. But I have not yet explained what happens within the sadist and the masochist; that is, what happens to the ego and how it is split in each perversion. This is extremely important, according to Deleuze, and needs some analysis, since it is this ego-split that excludes one perversion turning into the other.

As Deleuze explains in *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, both perversions produce an ego-splitting but with huge differences. In sadism the sadist is completely made up of a super-ego, whereas the masochistic ego

has been expelled on the outside: onto the sadist's victims. The masochistic ego is responsible for the feminine side, for feeling, empathy and a moral keeping in check. Once expelled on the outside there is no masochistic ego to hold the sadist back, to make him/her feel with, or care about others. The case is different and more complex in masochism. The masochist is made up of an apparently feeble masochistic ego; that is, one that seems incapable of acting. Yet this is not entirely true because it is the masochistic ego that directs the very scenario which seemingly crushes the masochist('s super-ego which still partly exists in the subject) – in compliance with the masochistic ego's wishes. The masochist's super-ego appears entirely on the outside in the form of the chosen desirable powerful woman (or man) that inflicts the punishment on her (his) masochistic victim. This again is not entirely true. The masochist chooses his/her torturer and dictates the scene which means that part of the super-ego remains with the masochist and part is projected onto the torturer.

Si la femme qui bat incarne encore le surmoi, c'est dans des conditions de dérision radicale: comme on joue d'une peau de bête, ou d'un trophée, à l'issue de la chasse. Car en fait le surmoi est mort – bien que ce ne soit pas sous l'effet d'une négation active, mais d'une «dénégation». Et la femme battante ne représente le surmoi, superficiellement et à l'extérieur, que pour en faire aussi l'objet des coups, le battu par excellence. Ainsi s'explique la complicité de l'image de mère et du moi, contre la ressemblance du père dans le masochisme. *La ressemblance du père désigne à la fois la sexualité génitale, et le surmoi comme agent de répression; or l'un est «vidé» avec l'autre.* Il y a là de l'humour, qui n'est pas simplement le contraire de l'ironie, mais qui procède par ses propres moyens. L'humour est le triomphe du moi contre le surmoi: «Tu vois, quoi que tu fasses, tu es déjà mort, tu n'existes qu'à l'état de caricature, et quand la femme qui me bat te représente, c'est encore toi qui es battu en moi. Je te nies puisque tu te nie toi-même.» Le moi triomphe, affirme son autonomie dans la douleur, sa naissance parthénogénétique à l'issue des douleurs, puisque celles-ci sont vécues comme affectant le surmoi. [...]. L'humour est l'exercice d'un moi triomphant, l'art du détournement ou de la dénégation du surmoi, avec toutes ses conséquences masochistes. Aussi y a-t-il un pseudo-sadisme dans le masochisme, comme il y a pseudo-masochisme dans le sadisme. Ce sadisme proprement masochique, qui

attaque le surmoi dans le moi et hors du moi, n'a rien à voir avec le sadisme du sadique.¹¹¹

The expelled super-ego is an object of derision; of *dénégation*. The masochist made up of masochistic ego and super-ego expels part of the super-ego onto the outside figure of desire. This outside figure is not really the super-ego but a make-believe version for the super-ego; that is, an effigy of sorts. This in itself is one way of punishing the super-ego (often seen as the father or authority), by turning it into a non-subject, a negative subject, or an overtly vicious subject that becomes object. The masochist then dictates to this desirable figure – whom he chooses as a mock-stand-in for the super-ego – the required version of power over (the super-ego in) himself. The masochistic ego wants the mock super-ego to punish it in order to free itself from its actual super-ego (representing active libido-desire), and from desiring to be (governed by) this super-ego. Since libido is active-masculine the masochist's aim here is to turn it into passive-feminine in himself by putting desire on hold, by denying or suspending it. Bellmer's doll's creation was in one way a negation of the father, of refusing him, a '*père-version*'.¹¹² In this case the process of beating the father, of denying him, does not come out of desire; that is, out of the desire to take the father's place – but from fear of being like him. This is speculative identification commonly linked to sadism and in a masochistically-structured fantasy becomes a pseudo-sadism.¹¹³ Bellmer punishes the doll: *sa fille artificielle* (see p.60). He identifies with the father on the outside as super-ego, parodying him in order to negate him, while identifying with the doll on the inside, the virtual embodiment of Bellmer's *moi*: its mirror-image.

In masochism the *dedans-dehors* is not clear-cut and straight-forward as in sadism. (Perhaps this is one reason for the difficulty in deciphering Bellmer's images.) Bellmer's dolls are not independent-objects but parts of Bellmer; that is, they embody virtual doubles for his inner ego-images. The dolls are physiological; that is, animated effigies (through bodily deformations and

through narrative) for the vulnerable, sensitive part of Bellmer: his *moi*.

Contrary to Sade's blatant atheism, Masoch's hero *par excellence* is Christ, according to Deleuze. Although Bellmer uses suffering and martyrdom in a profane context of parody, it represents some ideal – which remains unattainable – to be free (from actual inner pain), to deserve ecstasy, for salvation (from resembling the father; autocratic figures), in accordance to masochism's mythic idealisation as opposed to sadism's speculative identification.¹¹⁴

In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, Deleuze explains that masochism bases itself upon a disavowal (*dénégation* of castration) that frees the subject – from its fear of the other – yet aims at a continued suspension from fulfilling sexual desire. Disavowal endows the oral mother (feminine other) with a phallus. The suspension of desire furnishes the subject with an ideal, that of purity; that is, that of the return to being a newly born desexualised subject (*moi idéal*). Deleuze underlines an important difference between sadistic and masochistic processes; namely, that sadism comes out of thinking whereas masochism bases itself on pure fantasy and the imagination. Denial and suspension are purely imaginative processes – the mother is imagined, visualised with a phallus. This is not a real but an ideal situation, and therefore the phallus becomes an ideal (neutral) object. Thus suspension and denial lead to the subject's desexualisation. With this desexualisation 'le moi idéal' is achieved. Simultaneously as this 'moi idéal' is arrived at the subject experiences within him/herself a narcissistic satisfaction as he/she contemplates this achieved purification through the feminine other (oral mother). This then leads to the subject's resexualisation. In sadism desexualisation and resexualisation take place as immediate thinking without any outside intervention or time-lapsus. In masochism an outside agent is needed along with the powers of the imagination. For this reason fetishism is a necessary factor in the process of masochism. Masochism depends upon a dialectic process between an ideal desexualised subject and a resexualised narcissistic subject with the oral mother

as a mythical outside catalysing agent.¹¹⁵

This difference in behaviour between super-ego and masochistic ego in sadism and masochism may help clarify the type of perversion Bellmer's doll-stagings depict. If the doll is seen as the masochistic-ego expelled on the outside with Bellmer totally made up of super-ego then the perversion is sadism. However, this cannot be entirely correct. Each doll does embody a masochistic ego, yet since the dolls are a part of Bellmer (virtual images of his 'images de moi'), Bellmer has to be made up of both a masochistic ego and a super-ego – his masochistic ego is not expelled onto outside victims. In other words, through his dolls, Bellmer is illustrating what is happening to him, what he is feeling. In this sense the fantasies Bellmer depicts through his dolls and in his doll-images cannot be sadism but masochism. In addition, Deleuze explains that immediate thinking belongs to sadism, whereas suspended imagination with its stimulating outside agent belong to masochism. This again might help clear the ambiguity in reading Bellmer's work. Are Bellmer's fantasies projected onto his doll-images a way of *thinking* his dolls' perverse bodies, or are these a part of his imagination turned into images?

Bellmer's doll-stagings are fantasy and imagination, his dolls are intermediary objects between himself and the world; they are also objects from which he contemplates himself. As Foster states (p.123), Bellmer erotically manipulates his dolls pouring what he fears most into them, which means that there is desexualisation and resexualisation taking place from the subject towards the object and vice-versa. The desexualisation-resexualisation process is not immediate: it operates through the image – and the imagination. Although thinking and analysis also make up Bellmer's written and visual work, when these involve aggression – as they often do – it is not out of purely sadistic intent. The aggression or violence in Bellmer's analysis is not used to destroy and annihilate, but to better understand and come to terms with painful experiences, and above all how sexual desire – eroticism – persists and operates

under conditions of pain and horror, even in some cases because of these.

Another point one can argue is which comes first in Bellmer: thinking or imagination, or which one is used to support the other? I would argue the imagination (the artist) comes first as do the visual images. Then, like an engineer, Bellmer thinks how to construct his fantasy on the outside and how to analyse it. For instance his main text, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* is written later resulting from the need to analyse, and re-examine the process of imagination in his art. This is another reason for sadism in his work being a pseudo-sadism connected to masochism, rather than sadism as a primary process. In other words, it is pain and a revolt against what actually surrounds him and the erotic experience under pain that initially motivate Bellmer to escape into fantasy and recreate their effects in his doll-objects. Pain, revolt, eroticism are also motivating forces in sadism, the difference lies in the treatment of the (sexual) other. Sadism demands the other's annihilation, masochism does not: it requires the other's survival.

Bellmer never destroys his dolls, and very rarely does he let go of them. The images of the violent, desolate world Bellmer places his dolls in are images of how he senses the world to which the doll is merely reacting to. As I already explained, the sadism lies in the outside reality not in Bellmer; Bellmer reproduces this. Through the perverse constructions of his dolls Bellmer writes the torment, degradation, dehumanisation, that are effects of the experience of violence. Bellmer empathises with the dolls, using them to reproduce his inner feelings: as alter-egos which give his images a masochistic reading rather than a sadistic one.

For example, an image of *La Poupée*, 1935 (fig.18), shows another of Bellmer's four legged-doll in a scenario of pure fantasy. The photograph is black and white with an enlarged shoe menacingly suspended in the foreground. As a fantasy narrative the image represents a masochist structure because of its overt fetishism and suspension. Secondly, care has been taken to stage the scene. The

high-heeled shoe, almost the size of the doll, stands menacingly in mid-air, its heel pointing in the direction of the doll's twisted motionless body. It is an image of erotic manipulation based on suspension and denial. The shoe is a fetish object, its punishing presence desexualises the doll because of the fear of punishment-element that it instills in the latter (and the subject contemplating or identifying with the doll). This contemplation turns into an identification and leads to a narcissistic satisfaction that desexualised purification is taking place. This then leads to a resexualisation in both the subject and the doll (it regains its eroticism), thus satisfying the masochistic dialectic.

On a less psychoanalytical and phantasmagorical level this doll-image (like the others) is a metaphorical staging of a cruel world in which love and desire are subject to inhuman constraints, are always under threat, even though they persist. The doll's body of lack(ing upper torso and head) and excess (of lower limbs) is indicative of the effects of pain and repressed sexuality that inflate and multiply body parts (psychologically) while rendering the subject helpless, incapable of controlling its pain and of thinking coherently, reducing it to the mercy of imagining its body as freakish and to an exaggerated awareness of its lack.

In this section I concentrated on Deleuze's version of ego-splitting: super-ego and masochistic ego in masochism and in sadism. In sadism the masochistic ego responsible for feeling and guilt is expelled outside onto some object-victim. The sadist is completely made up of super-ego devoid of any remorse. In masochism an ambiguous situation arises. There the masochistic ego remains inside whereas the super-ego splits between the masochist who dictates the scenario and the masochist's chosen torturer who executes the scenario's script. In masochism it appears as if the torturer is in command, whereas in reality the latter is only a scapegoat; an effigy of sorts embodying a reflection of the super-ego which remains within the masochist. Masochism involves suspension, denial, *dénégation* – all present in Bellmer's images which I read as masochistic

scenarios. I read the image-scenarios as masochistic; but the dolls I read as virtual doubles for Bellmer's 'images de moi'. These can be seen both in Freudian terms and in Lacanian terms, as I explain in the next section.

In the analysis of masochism Deleuze brings up the dialectical relation between 'le moi idéal-moi narcissique'. The entity: 'moi idéal-moi narcissique' exists in Bellmer's dolls, it is underlined in his attachment to them, and in his erotic manipulation of them that oscillates between desexualisation and resexualisation. This 'moi idéal-moi narcissique' becomes an important factor in explaining Bellmer's choice of partner: Unica Zürn, as I discuss next. Zürn embodies Bellmer's narcissistic love. Zürn was chosen because she resembled Bellmer's dolls; his inner images of the self. That is, Zürn embodies the vulnerability and a condition of pain resulting from her intense sensitivity towards an insensitive world which turns her into Bellmer's doll come-to-life. Bellmer creates his own dolls, experiments with their bodies, stages them. It is only later that he meets his last companion Zürn and chooses her because she resembles his dolls. Bellmer goes on to experiment with Zürn's body, to stage and photograph her as if she was one of his dolls. I will analyse Bellmer's relation with Zürn and his images of Zürn, as well as some of Zürn's ideas regarding her relation to her body and to the male other. Zürn's body becomes part of Bellmer's art and another doll – all form a writing of Bellmer's perverse body and illustrate the effects of the experience of violence.

Hans Bellmer and Unica Zürn: *L'Anatomie de l'Amour*

'Lorsque les intentions d'une œuvre et celles d'une vie sont identiques d'une manière aussi évidente, comme c'est le cas chez Unica Zürn, le lecteur est en droit de s'intéresser au domaine privé de l'auteur.'¹¹⁶ Ruth Henry met Zürn in

1959. They became close friends and her comment underlines the thin margin that separated Zürn's life and her fiction: writings as well as drawings.¹¹⁷ Zürn confirms this in her autobiographical account, *Une rencontre avec Hans Bellmer*. Seized by a dark fit of desperation one night, she destroys many of her writings. Zürn writes: 'C'est comme un karma qui plane, menaçant, au-dessus d'elle, et qui fait que tout ce qu'elle aime le plus doit être détruit. Elle fait tellement corps avec son travail qu'en le faisant, elle se donne à elle-même une mort psychique.'¹¹⁸ Two points emerge here. One is Zürn's masochism in her auto-punishment by destroying what she loves (this also means that she has to reproduce work and does). The second is Zürn's relation to her work: a *faire* 'tellement corps avec son travail', that this destruction becomes a form of deadly self-contemplation. This 'corps avec son travail'; that is, this oneness with one's creative work also applies to Bellmer: his dolls are part of him. Bellmer creates dolls using them as models for his fantasies, to reflect feelings due to real life events and experiences. Bellmer then uses a readymade doll model: Zürn, as his art object. Zürn comes to represent a narcissistic love for Bellmer; that is, she is a part of him just like his dolls, as I discuss shortly.

In 1934 Bellmer creates his first doll. Bellmer's black and white photographs with his first doll, *Die Puppe*, 1934 (figs.19 & 20), are quite complex and ambiguous. In many ways the photographs are a record of Bellmer's attachment to his creature-object. The first photograph (fig.19) is of a seemingly incomplete doll: a work in progress. She stands propped against a wall paper-sketch of doll designs. Her body is not human, it is broken and eerie. Her arms are missing, one leg is clad with a sock and shoe, the other is skeletal, her stomach is open showing its inner mechanism. She has a wig and beret. The fact that she is incomplete yet semi-dressed means that this is her actual finished state: hers is a fragmented condition. Over her a ghostlike, fading Bellmer bends and looks out at the spectator/camera lens. It is as if Bellmer is portraying himself as the spirit of his broken creation – what brings her to life. He is also portraying her as his

feminine double. The doll here is not so much an emotional substitute, her broken state is a reflection of the suffering that lies within Bellmer: she is a psycho-physiological embodiment of Bellmer. As a doll she also refers back to childhood. Her state represents the fragmented memory of childhood and what happens to childhood as one steps further on into adulthood.

Die Puppe-photograph (fig.20) shows the doll's head close up with Bellmer's hand on her hair, stroking it and adjusting her cap. The artist-creator creating his creature-creation. In aesthetic terms this juxtaposition of the animate human hand with the inanimate-automaton does represent an uncanny surrealist image.

In a passage from *Petite Anatomie de l'Image* Bellmer describes one process by which his imagination produces images:

Dorénavant, il ne peut plus y avoir confusion à propos du processus de l'image. – Un 'génie' ardemment appliqué derrière le 'moi' semble ajouter beaucoup du sien, afin que 'je' perçoive et imagine. Un génie irrespectueux sans doute, pour qui la logique d'identité, la séparation du corps d'avec l'esprit ou les balivernes du 'bien' et du 'mal' sont tout au plus matière à plaisanteries et qui ne chante de tout cœur que la gloire de l'improbable, de l'erreur et du hasard. Tout comme si le rire était permis à la pensée, comme si l'erreur était la route, l'amour du monde acceptable et le hasard une preuve d'éternité.¹¹⁹

Bellmer is providing his account of the mechanisms behind his creativity. These mechanisms are driven by an unknown, supernatural force dictating Bellmer's creative instincts and imagination based upon irrational impulses. To this force, Bellmer attributes an irreverence towards what is religious, philosophical, and psychoanalytical; that is, towards elements that form human knowledge and life. In other words, Bellmer is saying that creativity and art are formed by two entities: 'un génie ardemment appliqué derrière le "moi",' and his perceiving and imagining "'je'". The former is irrational and undefined such as spirit, genius and pushes the artist to create. The other is logical, consisting of the various types of knowledge one accumulates with time. The latter include

personal experiences; that is, all that constitutes the thinking individual. Both come together in creating and constructing the work. In a way *Die Puppe* photographs can be seen as a record of the creative process Bellmer describes, above, with him as the spirit present and the doll (constructed through perception, imagination, and knowledge) as his physical other. This image illustrates what Bellmer calls: 'la séparation du corps d'avec l'esprit'.

Another work, Bellmer's painting of the doll *Die Puppe*, 1934 (fig.21), is just as perverse and psychologically complex. There eroticism is emphasized in the doll's position and suggestive facial expression. It is aggressive and overt. The doll is made to look like a maturely dressed, little girl. She is seated with her head slightly back, her eyes are closed and her lips are slightly parted. A board with a heart cut out digs into her neck. One of her legs is raised and twisted over a huge marble and ends in a black bottine with a high heel. It is a disturbing image full of contradictions. Bellmer's image shows ecstasy in the doll's expression that involves a near decapitation and dismembering: one limb is in half. It is an image of childhood pains, of puberty, of an awakening of sexuality, of a child's imitation of adulthood. If there is Surrealism in its uncanny doll-animation, it is also expressionist in that it depicts Bellmer's 'attitude vis-à-vis l'objet' (Kojève's phrase, p.100). ('L'objet' here would be a quality representing the body – for Bellmer – such as the loss of childhood, the intense experience of eroticism.) *Die Puppe* depicts mutilation and fragmentation, which rather than being sadistic or masochistic can be taken to represent Bellmer's relation to the body: the outpouring of his inner images into a virtual model, or his feelings towards the other's body. That is, *die Puppe* represents Bellmer's 'attitude vis-à-vis l'objet' – as do his other dolls. This takes the form of what Lacan calls 'L'agressivité en psychanalyse', 1948.

'L'agressivité dans l'expérience, nous est donnée comme intention d'agression et comme l'image de dislocation corporelle, et c'est sous de tels modes qu'elle se démontre efficiente.'¹²⁰ What Lacan means by 'image' are

mental phenomena representing aggressive intentions that are repressed in the unconscious, and eventually expressed verbally, physically, artistically or merely visualised through the imagination. These are due to any one or more conditions such as parental pressure, hardships, frustration, trauma, experienced by the subject that then has such 'images'.

Entre ces dernières il en est qui représente les vecteurs électifs des intentions agressives, qu'elles pourvoient d'une efficacité qu'on peut dire magique. Ce sont des images de castration, d'éviration, de mutilation, de démembrement, de dislocation, d'éventrement, de dévoration, d'éclatement du corps, bref, les *imagos* que personnellement j'ai groupées sous la rubrique qui paraît bien être structurale, d'*imago du corps morcelé*. Il y a là un rapport spécifique de l'homme avec son corps qui se manifeste [...] dans la généralité d'une série de critiques sociales [...] en tant qu'il dément dans les sociétés avancées ce respect des formes naturelles du corps humain. [...]. Il n'est pas besoin que d'écouter la fabulation et les jeux d'enfants [...] pour savoir qu'arracher la tête et crever le ventre sont des thèmes spontanés de leur imagination, que l'expérience de la poupée démantibulée ne fait que combler.¹²¹

Lacan names Jérôme (Hieronymus) Bosch (c.1450-1516) as *the* artist whose paintings provide 'l'atlas de toutes ces images agressives qui tourmentent les hommes.'¹²² Not as thorough nor as extensive as Bosch, Bellmer's images do contain several forms of psychoanalytical aggression which – granted – can be read as (a form of) sadism – depending on how one prefers to interpret Bellmerian narrative. In reality Bellmer's images are a manifestation of the specific relation man has towards his body and towards the other (representing specific qualities – pain, eroticism, childhood – that become the body) gone terribly wrong. A dislocated relation that voices itself through its aggressive reflection in his art. In fact Bellmer's images are often based on any one or more of the elements described by Lacan: mutilation, dismembering, dislocation.

In *Die Puppe: La Poupée* – a text of the same title and date (1934) – Bellmer writes:

Mais si l'on fait abstraction du baroque des sucreries, une seule bille en verre multicolore était capable d'élargir les idées dans une direction évidemment plus inquiétante. Quoique moins confidentielle elle s'offrait toute entière au regard, laissant voir dans une extase figée les spirales de son intimité. Elle captivait. Les pensées animées par sa tension prêtaient à la boule une force surnaturelle, jusqu'à ce qu'elle planât, vitreuse, dans l'espace. Attiré par ce prodige un ourlet de dentelle enserra la boule; la jambe égarée d'une petite poupée se courbait légèrement au-dessus, un fragment de boîte à cigares se dressait dans une verticale menaçante et vers le haut son «flor fina» se perdait sous la caresse bouclée des anglaises. Au milieu de tout cela un sein sourdait contre un éventail cassant, et une boufette du ruban pointait dans l'auréole rose ou verte du cerceau qui maintenait le tout.¹²³

In this text Bellmer expresses the seduction of little girls and the games he spied them playing. These childhood images he calls 'ce domaine rose'. He conjures up such souvenirs through objects associated with 'ce domaine rose' such as marbles and ribbons. Bellmer was fascinated by marbles and they appear in many of his images, as with other objects that had feminine associations: lace, roses, ribbons. He also expresses perverse desires and psychologically aggressive intentions:

Ne serait-ce pas le triomphe définitif sur les adolescentes aux grands yeux qui se détournait, si, sous le regard conscient pillant leurs charmes, les doigts agressifs assaillaient la forme plastique et construisaient lentement, membre à membre, ce que les sens et le cerveau s'étaient appropriés. Ajuster les jointures l'une à l'autre, soutirer aux boules et à leur rayon de rotation l'image des poses enfantines, suivre tout doucement le contour des vallons, goûter le plaisir des arrondis, faire des choses jolies, et répandre non sans quelque ressentiment le sel de la déformation. Enfin, se garder de rester immobile devant le mécanisme intérieur, effeuiller les pensées retenues des petites filles, et rendre visible, de préférence par le nombril, le tréfonds de ces pensées: panorama révélé dans la profondeur du ventre par une multicolore illumination électrique. Ne serait-ce pas une solution?¹²⁴

The doll-effigy expresses Bellmer's attitude towards dolls associated with, and

representing childhood, little girls, innocence and play. That is, the doll expresses a little boy's frustration at this inaccessible (erotically) feminine realm. Bellmer's textual fantasy enacted in his doll-constructions and drawings includes fetishism, the castration fantasy, a conscious sexual difference, and aggression. The aggression can be read as 'sadism with an underlying masochist subtext' (as Foster claims, p.123) – except that it is structured as a masochistic fantasy and therefore involves a pseudo-sadism. For instance, Bellmer desires to assault 'les formes plastiques' and to triumph over adolescents suggests sadism. Simultaneously Bellmer describes an image of masochism. He fantasizes over how to assault 'lentement,' 'tout doucement,' thus stressing a rhythm of slowness; of suspension. He desires to 'faire des choses jolies,' thus underlining aesthetic and fetishist preoccupations. He expresses a wish to 'répandre non sans quelque ressentiment le sel de la déformation,' that is, a wish akin to a sense of regret. These last elements all belong to masochism. In addition, Bellmer gives an aim which – although voyeuristic – is not geared towards purely sadistic annihilation; it seeks knowledge of a psychological, mental, even emotional order: to discover 'les pensées' through 'le ventre' *révéléteur*.

In 'De l'amour à la libido', 1964, Lacan discusses three different levels that play a part in an individual's emotional profile; in *l'amour*'s structure which is completely separate from *les pulsions*. These are defined, following Freud, as the real, the economic, and the biological.¹²⁵ In Lacan's reading of Freud, the real is responsible for provoking interest or disinterest towards objects and the other; the economic is responsible for providing pleasure or displeasure towards objects and the other; and the biological is responsible for the active-passive poles: loving and being loved.

Les pulsions nous nécessitent dans l'ordre sexuel – ça, ça vient du cœur. A notre grande surprise, il [Freud] nous apprend que l'amour, de l'autre côté, ça vient du ventre. [...]. Les oppositions qui y correspondent sont triples. Au niveau du réel, c'est ce qui intéresse et ce qui est indifférent.

Au niveau de l'économique, ce qui fait plaisir et ce qui fait déplaisir. C'est seulement au niveau du biologique que l'opposition activité-passivité se présente, en sa forme propre, la seule valable quant à son sens grammatical, la position aimer-être aimé.¹²⁶

Lacan underlines, via Freud, the important role the biological level – represented by a body organ: the stomach – plays in expressing the active-passive poles that lead to sexual difference, love, and possible aggression. Bellmer seems aware of the important role stomach and biology play in discovering the emotions and emotional attitude in oneself and the other. This is indicated by Bellmer's phrases above: 'rendre visible, de préférence par le nombril, le tréfond de ces pensées', 'révélé dans la profondeur du ventre'. Also several of Bellmer's images emphasize the dolls' stomachs. (See *La Poupée*, fig.8.) Bellmer constructs the majority of his dolls with a fixed stomach embodied by the ball joint (Cardan joint, discussed in chapter one, p.39). In addition, Bellmer's statement about his experiments with body parts, substituting one for another, creating bodily permutations, underlines the fact that whatever permutation parts of the body undergo there is always a fixed point through which sensation has to flow: 'à la hauteur du nombril'.¹²⁷

Die Puppe (fig.21) is also an image depicting a transitional experience towards what Bellmer calls 'une réalité troisième'. There a little girl-doll is going through what appears to be a sexual experience. On the outside she most probably will still appear the same, on the inside – on a psychological level – she will have changed. Her initial reality of innocence and play changes on contact with the second reality: the outside world. She is shown in Bellmer's image supposedly undergoing what he calls a third reality; her sexual experience. The image also illustrates a primal fantasy of castration that includes sexual difference combined as narcissistic activity in the girl's auto-eroticism and her search for body-pleasure, and passivity in her acceptance of this fetishist pleasure.

Die Puppe strangely prefigures (as do several of Bellmer's images) and reflects some of Zürn's childhood sexual recollections in *Dunkler Frühling* (1967, *Sombre Printemps*):

Elle va à la bibliothèque de son père et se plonge dans l'examen des images obscènes de *Sittengeschichte* de Fuchs. Ce faisant, elle en veut à son père de posséder de tels ouvrages. Elle aimerait un père noble et pareil à un Dieu. Elle s'est cachée avec le livre, dans un coin, derrière le grand fauteuil de cuir et s'onanise en regardant les images. Elle ne peut plus penser à rien d'autre. Mais à se répéter trop souvent, la sensation de volupté laisse derrière elle un vide déprimant. Elle cherche un vrai complément qui la satisfasse mais n'en trouve pas. Tout est faux. Tous les enfants de son âge font des expériences semblables. Les fillettes qu'elle connaît s'introduisent des crayons, des carottes et des bougies entre les jambes; elles se frottent aux angles aigus des tables, se dandinent nerveusement sur leur chaise. Et toutes, si jeunes soient-elles, pressentent que le salut et la guérison de leurs jeunes souffrances ne peuvent venir que de l'homme. Mais aucune d'elles n'en connaît un qui la prendrait dans ses bras. Elles sont trop petites.¹²⁸

Zürn's childhood account is very disturbing, sad, and lonely. There satisfaction can come only from the outside in the form of a(n absent) male-other. There lies in Zürn's childhood a painful consciousness of sexual difference through the double recognition of female lack and incompleteness; that is, physical completion and emotional salvation come from the male other and this is not possible because of physical insignificance: 'elles sont trop petites'. Therefore the little girls seek object-substitutes to *fill* their lack. This account is one of several denoting Zürn's portrayal of the castration fantasy and fetishism. Bellmer's doll-portrait (fig.21) finds its literary voice in Zürn's poignant reminiscences.

Bellmer met Zürn at the opening of his exhibition organised by the gallery-owner Rudolph Springer. The exhibition took place at *La Maison de France* in Berlin on the 3rd of November, 1953. Zürn had gained some notoriety for her stories published in journals. Springer, who knew her, comments on how she looked that evening: 'elle portait une robe noire un peu brillante [...] et qui

tombait jusqu'au genou; elle avait accroché une rose rouge à sa taille, ce qui ne se faisait pas à l'époque, et c'était très chic [...]. Unica Zürn correspondait complètement à sa poupée; c'était très important, et ils se sont compris tout de suite.'¹²⁹ Bellmer saw Zürn as the living embodiment of his doll. This led to their immediate understanding of one another, and gives some indication of his need to seek out a companion like his doll. There are also the 'uncanny resonances' or *hasard* between Bellmer's lonely broken doll images and Zürn's texts that point to a mental affinity between them and a *faire corps* with one another.

In one of his letters to the psychoanalyst Dr. Ferdière about his choice of female companions, Bellmer talks about the transfer process on him of his wife Margarete's illness. In the letter Bellmer asks Dr. Ferdière whether this came about from a hypocritical intention of masking the fact, of running away from it, or whether,

[...] on peut voir en moi le type d'hommes avec des antennes, qui captent la femme-victime future, même avec les yeux fermés. [...]. Reste donc à savoir si j'ai 'flairé' tout de suite (1953, automne, Berlin-Ouest) dès la première rencontre (vernissage) en Unica une victime. Si Unica s'interrogeait sérieusement en ce sens [...] elle répondrait, je crois, OUI !¹³⁰

In another letter to Dr. Ferdière, Bellmer writes:

[...] à propos d'Unica, [...] l'état général. Apathie, manque total d'initiative, même verbale, le long d'un après-midi, d'une soirée avec moi ou avec d'autres personnes-amies. Fatigue nerveuse et intellectuelle. Elle s'entoure d'un mur de caoutchouc. Presqu'aucun effort d'autrui n'y laisse une empreinte. – Le Dr. Weiss, qui n'avait pas vu Unica depuis plusieurs mois me disait à peu près ceci : « Je suis très frappé, elle est apathique, prostrée..., elle me fait penser à l'automate des *Contes d'Hoffmann* (la poupée Olympia, qui sait dire oui, oui... non, non, etc.) »¹³¹

Bellmer's description of Unica and his consciousness of being emotionally drawn to a specific female profile ties in with his creative obsession concerning a particular representation of the feminine: broken dolls. The fact that Bellmer was attracted to Zürn because she embodied 'une victime' does not necessarily imply Bellmer's sadism, rather it demonstrates his complicity with her, his empathy towards and feeling with her. Zürn reflected his dolls.

Strangely enough the surrealist chance encounter, *le hasard objectif*, became a reality in Bellmer's and Zürn's encounter. Even more bizarre, this took place at a surrealist exhibition. In her novels: *Der Mann im Jasmin* (1966, *L'Homme-Jasmin*) and *Sombre Printemps* Zürn talks of meeting 'the stranger,' a man of specific qualities. In *Sombre Printemps* Zürn relates her masochist fantasy:

Elle rêve d'un homme sombre qui exercera sa violence sur elle. De toute la force de son imagination, elle appelle ardemment un homme sauvage aux instincts meurtriers. Quand elle est couchée, la nuit, dans sa chambre, elle imagine une salle noire, étincelante de diamants, éclairée par des torches vacillantes. Le noir, la couleur la plus inquiétante qu'elle connaît, domine dans le tableau. Elle se trouve sur un bloc de marbre noir et froid aux arêtes tranchantes. Ses ravisseurs l'ont enchaînée. Elle est nue et tremble de froid et d'excitation. Les flammes lugubres des torches se reflètent dans les murs noirs de la pièce. Les bords de son lit de supplices lui entaillent la chair du dos. Le cercle des hommes vêtus de noir apparaît et se ferme autour d'elle. Des yeux de braise la regardent par les trous d'abominables masques. Certains de ces hommes portent des casques étincelants. Ils arrachent leur masque et elle voit des farouches visages d'Arabes, de Chinois, de Nègres et d'Indiens. Aux Blancs, elle préfère les hommes de couleur. Aucun ne ressemble à un homme de sa connaissance. Ils sont muets et immobiles. Elle en a peur et c'est très important pour elle. Elle aime l'angoisse et la terreur. Elle se sent infiniment honorée d'être ainsi le centre d'attention de ces hommes. Tous sont armés. Ils sont venus pour la tuer. C'est un grand honneur pour elle. [...]. Une musique d'orgue assourdissante retentit. Une musique menaçante et dolente. [...]. Elle tire sur ses chaînes pour qu'elles entament plus profondément sa chair. Son imagination est si forte qu'elle éprouve de la douleur. Cette scène, elle ne la vit pas toujours jusqu'à sa mort qui résulte de milliers de coup de couteau lents et toujours retardés. Il est défendu de crier ou de modifier l'expression de son visage. Un couteau pénètre lentement dans sa blessure.¹³²

This passage provides a description (one of several) rich in psychological complexity that manifests itself through Zürn's relation to her body. It contains: fetishism, a castration fantasy of burning female lack, obsessive sexual difference, internal conflict, repression, masochism, perversion. All of these aspects are connected through fetishism and masochism, and easily slip into one another. The staging of a violent scene of rape and the slow revelling in details of art and torture strongly point to the structure of masochist fantasy – described by Deleuze to be – based on unhurried theatricality. Furthermore, the suspension in achieving an aim or closure, the suffocating atmosphere of anguish and languidity are all elements coming out of the force of the imagination. Again according to Deleuze, masochism comes out of the imagination, whereas sadism is a form of thinking. Zürn's specific choice of torturer in her description of the unknown-other (dark, foreign, savage, sinister) belongs to masochism – in sadism there maybe preferences but no specific physical profile is required for either victim or torturer. Zürn's phrases: 'elle en a peur et c'est très important pour elle,' 'elle aime l'angoisse et la terreur,' 'elle se sent infiniment honorée' in her torture, all provide conflicting qualities including her description of 'une musique menaçante et dolente,' that are aspects of masochistic fantasy. There is also a desperate cry for attention and love that masochists feel deserves to be stifled and punished in Zürn's phrase: 'il est défendu de crier [...]'.

Bellmer's understanding of Zürn's tortured needs find their echo in his own artistic images and he transforms the image of her body into his doll. Bellmer's theoretical ideas expressed in *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* find their textual double in some of Zürn's writings, and are also mirrored in his art, as well as in his repetitive insistence on the importance of *le hasard* in one's relation with the outside world in a chapter called *Le Monde extérieur*. To better explain Bellmer's perverse images of Zürn; that is, how she comes to represent a part of him embodying a narcissistic love substituting itself for his dolls, an explanation of narcissism and aspects of

identification are necessary. Bellmer discusses love, narcissism, identification with the feminine other in his text *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*'s chapters: *L'Anatomie de l'amour* and *Le Monde extérieur*. For this reason I will turn to these and link them to Freud's and Lacan's ideas on narcissism and mirror identification from which Bellmer also seems to borrow before turning to his images of Zürn.

L'Anatomie de l'amour represents Bellmer's ideas about desire, the lover's body (the desiring body: his and the other's) compressed in a few pages dense with meaning that is not easily understood. One has to almost *imagine* meaning in order to gain access to it. Bellmer's entire text is like many of his works: a large amount is said within a compressed space. Bellmer starts his chapter with an obscure quotation by Sade: 'les effets n'ont pas toujours besoin d'une cause', and these lines: 'Puisque le germe du désir est avant l'être, la faim avant le moi, le moi avant l'autre, – l'expérience de Narcisse alimentera l'image du toi'.¹³³ In other words, the effects of desire, the effects of hunger exist before one exists; one's existence is conditioned by them. However, the effect of one's image in the mirror gives birth to the image of the other. This can take place only after one's birth. Bellmer is evoking and anticipating perversion and psychoanalysis – Sade, (the myth of) Narcissus, Freud, Lacan – through his choice of words and phrase chronology. Bellmer's description of one's narcissistic experience producing the other's image comes close to Deleuze's comments on the relation 'moi narcissique-moi idéal' that belongs to a masochist dialectic: 'Mais au plus haut point de la désexualisation masochiste continue de se produire simultanément la resexualisation dans le moi narcissique, qui contemple son image dans le moi idéal à travers la mère orale.'¹³⁴ Bellmer's words express the beginnings of desire in the guise of a need for alimentation that exists before the birth of the (re)sexualised individual aware of his/her image. That is, the beginnings of desire start with the desexualised (still pure) individual who is nurtured by the mother at birth. Maternal nurturing produces the image of the

other in that it awakens the subject's narcissism and initiates his/her sexuality through the oral pleasure that comes with nurturing. A process of (re)sexualisation starts taking place. Bellmer is not actually describing a masochistic process, as does Deleuze. He is describing the beginnings of a masochistic ego; a passive-feminine-infantile experience implying childhood's dependence on the masochistic ego until the active super-ego awakens through narcissism and develops.

In *On Narcissism: an introduction*, 1914, Freud starts with Paul Näcke's 1899-definition of narcissism 'to denote the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated – who looks at it [...] strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities. [...] to this degree narcissism has the significance of a perversion that has absorbed the whole of the subject's sexual life, and it will consequently exhibit the characteristics which we expect to meet with in the study of all perversions'.¹³⁵ Freud concludes that 'a person may love according to the narcissistic type: a. what he himself is (i.e. himself), b. what he himself was, c. what he himself would like to be, d. someone who was once part of himself'.¹³⁶ In other words, narcissism is libidinal and dictates a specific love profile – always related to the self. To Bellmer, Zürn represents a narcissistic love since she is the reflection of an integral part of Bellmer: his doll. Bellmer's phrase: 'l'expérience de Narcisse alimentera l'image du toi' – where 'image de toi' indicates the other: both his doll-creations and Zürn (he wrote this text during their relation) – can be taken to express the intense eroticism he experiences through his perverse images of them.¹³⁷

For instance in *L'Anatomie de l'amour* (*Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*'s second chapter), Bellmer is obsessively occupied with the body which he constructs as an effigy, as an object of his narcissistic love since it contains representational images of himself, of his childhood, and of the ideal-feminine coming from within him. There Bellmer

states: 'l'homme épris d'une femme et de soi-même ne désespère qu'assez tard de polir l'aveugle miroir de plomb que la femme représente, pour exalter, pour la voir exaltante.'¹³⁸ Bellmer starts with the real as an unified entity, 'épris d'une femme et soi-même', then goes to the virtual mirror-image which transforms into a third reality: the desired woman is the blind mirror of lead – through love experience. That is, the desired-woman is the material of the mirror-image. A man in love blindly identifies with the love-object; she becomes the mirror in which he sees his image under a form of visual aberration due to love.

Bellmer was an avid reader of different kinds of books: anatomy, literature, mathematics, biology, in particular he was extremely interested in psychoanalysis. Bellmer wrote *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* in 1957. He would have been familiar with Lacan's famous paper 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur du Je', formulated at the Marienbad Congress of Psychoanalysis in 1936, revised and later published several times. According to Lacan, in the mirror phase a child first identifies with its real image seen in the mirror, or with the image of another (often a child but this could also be an adult). Identifying with the image of the other (or others, this can change) produces what Lacan calls 'the imaginary'; in that if one identifies with the other, one then becomes trapped in the other's image. This means that anything happening to the other automatically effects the one identifying with the other's image. For example, if the other is slapped, the child identifying with the other feels the pain. This imaginary aspect of identification, the ego experiences as a form of alienation. The ego is an incomplete structure and needs to identify with an alien outside image. It then builds itself on this alienating identification. Alienating identification is the psychical action that triggers off the narcissism seated in the ego. Lacan's 'Le Stade du miroir comme formateur du Je' thesis provided an answer to Freud's question in *On Narcissism* as to what psychical action brings about narcissism in the individual, since narcissism does not exist with birth. Bellmer is aware of this: 'l'expérience de

Narcisse alimentera l'image du toi' (cited above). One experiences narcissism through an idealisation of the self or other, through imaginary or alienating identification with the other; one is not born with narcissism. 'Le Stade du Miroir comme formateur du Je' explains the imaginary, alienation, and the fragmentation of one's image, of one's body: Bellmer's creative obsession. In Lacan's words:

Ce développement est vécue comme une dialectique temporelle qui décisivement projette en histoire la formation de l'individu: *le stade du miroir* est un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation – et qui pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, – et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental. Ainsi la rupture du cercle de l'*Innenwelt* à l'*Umwelt* engendre-t-elle la quadrature inépuisable des récolements du moi. Ce corps morcelé, dont j'ai fait aussi recevoir le terme dans notre système de références théoriques, se montre régulièrement dans les rêves, quand la motion de l'analyse touche à un certain niveau de désintégration agressive de l'individu. Il apparaît alors sous la forme de membres disjoints et de ces organes figurés en exoscopie, qui s'ailent et s'arment pour les persécutions intestines, qu'à jamais fixées par la peinture le visionnaire Jérôme Bosch, dans leur montée au siècle quinzième au zénith imaginaire de l'homme moderne. Mais cette forme se révèle tangible sur le plan organique lui-même, dans les lignes de fragilisation qui définissent l'anatomie fantasmatique, manifeste dans les symptômes de schize ou de spasme, de l'hystérie.¹³⁹

Lacan's passage underlines the relation between bodily fragmentation, psychic aggression, and one's image of oneself. Individuals suffer from psychic aggression due to the severing of connections between their defense mechanisms and the everyday, and between these mechanisms and the individual's own history. That is, such individuals are extremely sensitive and vulnerable to outside events and personal experiences that are negative, violent, traumatic. These experiences become exaggerated in their minds and they are incapable of defending themselves psychologically against them. This causes

these individuals' defences to weaken and in many cases destroys these defences.¹⁴⁰ The dislocation of this defence mechanism-relation to the outer world then manifests itself through images of bodily dislocations, dismembering and fragmentations. The reason for this is that our bodies are our sole contact with the outer world, as well as the line dividing the outer world with our inner world. Lacan explains that the manifestations of the breakdown of the defense mechanism take place through a body's failed or erroneous gestures. It can also take place through dreams of bodily-fragmentation and images of limbs attacking the stomach (the source of loving and being loved). Lacan also expresses the fact that such phenomena can take place in the creative field; in artworks, for example. There a sublimation occurs; that is, instead of the individual living his fantasies due to psychic aggression in the real he turns these fantasies into art. The artist Lacan gives as a perfect example of this is Jérôme Bosch (also mentioned earlier).

Bellmer is another artistic example who uses bodily-fragmentation and dismembering. Lacan's statement on psychic aggression taking the form of *corps morcelé* can be used to explain some aspects of Bellmer's *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, as well as many of Bellmer's body-images. Through his art, Bellmer translates Lacan's *corps morcelé* on the one hand as due to an inner splitting and doubling – that stems from Bellmer's *Innenwelt* – of his *images du moi*. This points to an aggressive disintegration of identity due to acute sensitivity and intense feelings because of unpleasant contacts with the outside surroundings: *Umwelt*, and the need to react to these. The rupture between inside and outside that Lacan describes gives rise, in Bellmer's case, to several of his images.

Bellmer gives an interesting account of alienating identification in *Le Monde extérieur* (*Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*'s third chapter), as his version of Lacan's 'rupture du cercle de l'*Innenwelt* à l'*Umwelt*':

Être saisi de la vue d'un arbre qui est tordu parmi d'autres de son espèce, qui le sont d'une façon différente ou qui ne le sont pas, c'est être disposé au geste de la contorsion du double qui est l'arbre et qui me dispense de me tordre, puisqu'il le fait à ma place. Trouver en route une pierre, précieuse par le rapport à première vue hermétique qu'elle paraît avoir avec mon existence, c'est ressentir qu'elle répond précisément, dans l'ordre morphologique de son langage à une émotion en moi jusque-là inexprimée. Mais que l'arbre soit vu et la trouvaille de la pierre faite, cela suppose comme de l'intuition et, avant elle, un état de vigilance ou d'attention particulières, tendues vers ces identités entre l'individu et son monde extérieur.¹⁴¹

In the above, Bellmer describes how one can identify with any outside object that effects him/her, or holds some special association in memory. Here a tree becomes the double for Bellmer's body. In this case the tree serves as a pretext for Bellmer to underline the intense effect the outside can have on the inside – to the extent that one ends up becoming the outside and imitating it. The main point is that this is done through bodily expression and gestures. The body and one's relation to it are of paramount importance in demonstrating one's inner relation to the outside world. That is, how well (or badly) one is integrated in the world. One's state of mind and one's emotional state play a crucial role on the imagination that produces the alienating identification that takes its image from the outside world, appropriating or imitating it, and then includes this outer world as its audience. This is what Lacan calls the symbolic. Alienating identification is the individual identifying with some image: a tree, or stone in Bellmer's examples above. Lacan's symbolic represents: for whom I am identifying with a tree, or whose gaze I seek through this identification. It defines the position from where the individual wants to be looked at (by a specific other).¹⁴² In his text Bellmer highlights the continuous exchange between the inside and outside that takes place through and is manifested in the body. Although the above passage does not explicitly refer to the symbolic; that is, to one's identifying with a specific other or object, and taking his/her/its

place in order to attract a desired other's gaze, Bellmer's use of the plural 'identités' suggests an awareness of the different types of identification between the individual and the outside world which must include the symbolic. (Bellmer is definitely aware of the latter in his creation of doll-images, if only through his use of photography and the substitution of Zürn in their place.)

In *L'Anatomie de l'amour* Bellmer illustrates how language can play on the imagination of an individual in love, as well as becoming itself a form of alienating identification.¹⁴³ Bellmer states that a man in love becomes a woman psycho-physically; that is, he imagines the woman through his body and expresses himself in feminine terms. 'L'essentiel est que l'image de la femme avant d'être visualisée par l'homme ait été vécue par son propre schéma corporel.'¹⁴⁴ That is, the image of the woman as love-object has to have existed within the male as desiring-subject before she becomes material reality. Woman: an invisible inner image has become visible and concrete; that is, the image of the feminine other is initially nurtured from within, before it finds its outside expression. According to Bellmer, in love, there is a constant exchange between the desired-feminine-other and the desiring-male-subject. This is underlined in *Le Monde extérieur* with Bellmer wondering: 'dans quelle mesure l'image de la femme désirée serait prédéterminé par l'image de l'homme qui désire'.¹⁴⁵ Bellmer then starts imagining a series of phallic projections that become covered or modified by different parts of the female body to the extent that: 'L'image du corps subit comme une "extraversion" l'étrange contrainte d'un mouvement du dedans au dehors.'¹⁴⁶ Desire causes this movement from 'le dedans au dehors' since it can only be expressed through moving towards what Lacan calls 'le champ de l'Autre';¹⁴⁷ that is, the sphere of the other, the object of desire (linguistically and/or physically).

As an example Bellmer relates the erotic experience of his friend, the poet Joë Bousquet (1897-1950). Bousquet was paralysed by a bullet in 1918 aged 21. In 1932 Bousquet falls deeply in love with a young girl who reciprocates this love.

In his prose Bousquet talks of their love and Bellmer quotes Bousquet: 'Dans l'instant où nous n'étions qu'une chair notre amour était femme. [...] elle faisait de son corps dévêtue la transparence de mon cœur. Je la possédais de moi avant de la posséder. [...]. Il me semblait que je voulais renaître sur elle de la femme que j'étais invisiblement.'¹⁴⁸ These phrases point to the awakening of the poet's feminine feelings through this powerful encounter with the feminine other – a manifestation of Bousquet's erotic narcissism. Bellmer describes how Bousquet began to change; his voice began to resemble hers, his image became transformed into hers. Bellmer claims 'elle habite son corps' [Bousquet's] and goes on that in love 'le Toi se déréalise en faveur d'une image assimilée au Moi; il devient intérieurement et à des profondeurs prénatales, la femme qu'il s'apprête à posséder.'¹⁴⁹ Bellmer uses psychoanalytical terms as 'prénatales' and refers to this as 'ce transfer' concluding 'le masculin et le féminin sont devenus des images interchangeables; l'une et l'autre tendent à leur alliage dans l'hermaphrodite.'¹⁵⁰ For Bellmer 'l'hermaphrodite' represents the biologically male (or female) individual who becomes other: feminine (or masculine) internally through erotic experience and an intense identification with the other sex.

In 'De l'amour à la libido' Lacan stresses the importance of language as a movement towards the object of desire, as a form of 'extraversion'. 'Par l'effet de la parole le sujet se réalise toujours plus dans l'Autre, mais il ne poursuit déjà plus là qu'une moitié de lui-même.'¹⁵¹ Language is always directed towards someone else. Its metonymic nature divides and fragments the subject's desire since its meaning depends on the other as well as on the self. It is subject to the other's interpretation. To express desire the subject has to be split in two: one that says what he/she wants to say, and the other to say this in a way that is understood by the other – as the speaker wants it to be understood. There is always distortion with language-desire. For minimal distortion to occur there has to be what Bellmer calls a transfer from 'le dedans au dehors' or 'une

alliage dans l'hermaphrodite' (impossible in the real). As I mentioned above, Lacan explains that the active-passive relation belongs to the biological level, he defines the position of loving-being loved that comes from the stomach, and embodies the sexual relation in its naming, defining, recovering, metaphorising of sexual difference.¹⁵² The relation of the masculine-feminine can only be psychologically apprehended through the opposite poles of active-passive according to Freud.¹⁵³ In other words, the place of masculine and feminine are not fixed or absolute. They are only fixed in biological terms through the body. Otherwise they are not fixed in terms of activity-passivity; either one can be active or passive. Nor are they fixed in the sociological sense. There it depends on an individual's respective social or political position.¹⁵⁴

Bellmer describes this fluidity between the masculine and the feminine which is non-biological but takes place through desire, and the image made up of the gaze and the imagination, and of language. Through Freud's meaning of activity-passivity which depends on libido, and not biology, masculine and feminine are interchangeable, and therefore in Bellmer's view they form an 'alliage dans l'hermaphrodite'.

In general, Bellmer's chapter on the anatomy of love combines several ideas from the poetic and surrealist to a reading of Freud and Lacan's concepts of libido, love, and types of identification. There Bellmer discusses the active-passive, stomach, heart, biological, physiological, masculine-feminine, aggressive physiological body permutations based on imagined examples through his images, Bousquet's love-anatomy-language experience, and Lhermitte's patients' hallucinations from *L'image de notre corps*.

Bellmer's philosophy of love and his ideas of a feminine-masculine anatomy of love, expressed poetically by Bousquet, found an ideal love object in Zürn. Bellmer also found his doll in Zürn. He used her as his model instead of the doll. In another example that belongs to sadomasochism, more precisely to a form of criminal sadism, Bellmer relates a real event by what he calls 'l'artisan

criminel'. (See Bellmer's drawing, fig.22):

Pour avoir des preuves objectives, on aura recours par conséquent à l'artisan criminel par la passion la plus humainement sensible et la plus belle, celle d'abolir le mur qui sépare la femme de son image. D'après le souvenir intact que nous gardons d'un certain document photographique, un homme, pour transformer sa victime, avait étroitement ficelé ses cuisses, ses épaules, sa poitrine, d'un fil de fer serré, entrecroisé à tout hasard provoquant des boursouflures de chair, des triangles physiques irréguliers, allongeant des plis, des lèvres malpropres, multipliant des seins jamais vus en des emplacements inavouables.¹⁵⁵

Figs.23-25, 1965, are images of Zürn tied up in string like a parcel of meat. She is semi-clothed which further emphasizes her *nakedness*. Bellmer is acting out both Zürn's and his own masochist fantasy along the lines of 'l'artisan criminel' who seeks to 'abolir le mur qui sépare la femme de son image.' In a strange and perverse manner Bellmer may be trying to undo Zürn's image of herself in a gesture of love towards her. Zürn's image of herself; her perception of herself and her image were negative and demeaning. Playing with her body and photographing it in what must be recognised as sadistic and degrading images can be Bellmer's psychological method of shocking her into the realisation that she was of value. At least this can be read as an attempt by Bellmer to shock Zürn into some revolt. This does not happen. Zürn was passive and very lethargic.¹⁵⁶ Bellmer is also fulfilling her masochist fantasy of being tied up as she writes in *Sombre Printemps*. At the same time Bellmer identifies (alienating identification, narcissist love) with Zürn and lives his fantasy on her body as a form of complicity between them.

Zürn's obsessive masochism, her internal conflicts, and the suffering she had undergone as a child led to fits of schizophrenia and to her confinement for certain periods in mental clinics. She describes the absent father whom she adored: 'Son père est le premier homme dont elle fait connaissance. [...]. Elle l'aime depuis le premier jour. [...]. Bientôt en grandissant, elle remarque avec

une douloureuse surprise qu'il n'est presque jamais à la maison.'¹⁵⁷ She gives an account of her brother raping her when she was ten, of an uncaring mother whom she despised.¹⁵⁸ It is hardly surprising for anyone under these circumstances – let alone a person with Zürn's sensitivity – not to become traumatised and schizophrenic. Bellmer concludes that Zürn's mental state came about because of her excessive masochism. In a 1964 letter to Dr Ferdière Bellmer writes:

J'avais oublié d'insérer dans mon «exposé» d'hier un problème crucial dans la structure d'Unica, je note donc en abrégé:

1.) Masochisme, qui ne se transforme que très rarement (crises ascendantes-schizophrènes) en son contraire.

C'est pourquoi elle appartient à la catégorie de ceux qui se font interner d'office masochisme social [...].

Unica, dans toutes les péripéties sentimentales de sa vie, refroidie peut-être, rentrait volontairement dans le rôle de «l'abandonnée», tout en abandonnant (ses enfants par expl. – moi, parfois – son œuvre (en le déchirant, le jettant par la fenêtre, ou en le donnant, souvent au <à> titre de cadeau injustifié, ou en se faisant carotter par un marchand[...])

Il s'y ajoute, [...] comme une satisfaction sadique: «Eh bien, tu vois, je suis idiot – tant pis pour moi <toi> ...»... Il y aura toujours quelqu'un qui m'aidera, qui me sortira de «là»; sinon – si ma destinée le veut – je mourrai.»¹⁵⁹ [The strange punctuation and terms are Bellmer's.]

In fact Zürn did commit suicide in 1970, by throwing herself from a window just as the little girl does at the end of *Sombre Printemps*. The novel was about Zürn's childhood impressions, written in the 1967 during her relationship with Bellmer. Whether she had such an end in mind is highly probable. She was very attached to Bellmer and did have a perverse erotic-artistic relationship with him. According to Ruth Henry, 'Unica avait exprimé de vive voix, mais aussi maintes fois dans ses écrits, l'affirmation que la mort dans la vieillesse lui semblait odieuse.'¹⁶⁰ There were many times when Zürn felt inadequate in her love for Bellmer and tried to detach herself from him without success. In 1969 Bellmer had a very strong heart attack which would have made her realise that she could

really lose him any time, and Zürn could not live alone.¹⁶¹ In her *Journal* Zürn writes: 'Bellmer et elle, depuis 1953 des camarades dans la misère, une amitié immense avec quelque terreur pour elle.'¹⁶² (The terror Zürn mentions is of her losing him, of not being up to standard.) The makeup of the masochist victim exists in Zürn's autobiographical writings, and in Bellmer's comments about her there is a strong recognition of her masochism.

Céphalopode à deux (autoportrait avec Unica), 1955 (fig.26), is the double portrait of Bellmer with his doll: Unica Zürn. One side of the image contains Unica's doll-like head with a lace (collage) bow in her hair and part of her upper torso semi-covered by a lace (collage) bodice – a material much liked and used by Bellmer. Her lower body is twisted with its sexual organs standing out in the foreground. Within these organs Bellmer's parched hardened face with its severe gaze looks out at the spectator. His eyes are in sharp contrast with Unica's vague absent look.

In *L'Homme-Jasmin*, a novel written while Zürn was interned in a clinic and undergoing treatment, she comments:

Lorsqu'un million de globules rouges l'abandonnent, lorsque son corps se couvre des nombreuses taches rouges d'une allergie, elle écrit dans ses «Notes d'une anémique»: «Quelqu'un qui voyage en moi me traverse. Je suis devenue sa maison. Dehors, dans le paysage noir à la vache puissant, quelqu'un prétend exister. Vu sous cet angle le cercle se rétrécit autour de moi. Traversée par lui au-dedans c'est là ma nouvelle situation. Et cela me plaît.»¹⁶³

This hallucinatory memory is one of many of Zürn's reminiscences which alternate between the memories of actual events, and those of pure sensation and imagination – memories oscillating between real and virtual, to use Bellmer's words. It is also indicative of the schizophrenia and split-personality that was to become Zürn's fate during the last eight years of her life. However, this passage could have been inspired by the memory – almost twenty years later – of

Bellmer's *Céphalopode* painting of them together and what Zürn feels towards Bellmer.

For Bellmer the 'céphalopode' structure is yet another experimental construction of the body:

En opposant la division à la multiplication et pour en revenir à la question du 'détail', il va sans dire qu'il n'y a qu'un pas à faire pour que la jambe, isolément perçue et isolément appropriée à la mémoire, aille vivre triomphalement sa vie propre, libre de se dédoubler, quand ce ne serait que pour tirer de la symétrie une illusion justificative de ses moyens d'être; libre de s'en tenir à une tête, de s'asseoir, céphalopode, sur ses seins ouverts en raidissant le dos que sont ses cuisses, bifurcation arquée du pont double qui conduit de la bouche aux talons. [...]. Mais avant même de naître de la soustraction et de la division elle dérive de plusieurs méthodes entremêlées dont une est celle que les mathématiciens appellent 'permutation'. [...] le corps est comparable à une phrase [...].¹⁶⁴

Bellmer describes a bio-mathematical organism that becomes through his *Céphalopode* image *l'anatomie de l'amour*. It also expresses Bellmer's view on the inseparability of body and language or expression, particularly in love. The *Céphalopède* double portrait can be read in terms of a superposition of his encounter with Zürn.

Zürn can be seen as the image provided by *le hasard* in the external world and finds its uncanny resonances within Bellmer's internal image as he writes in the final pages of *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'Anatomie de l'Image*:

Ce qui n'est pas confirmé par le hasard n'a aucune validité. On aimerait penser qu'il existe comme un écran de projection, tendu entre le moi et son monde extérieur, sur lequel l'inconscient projette l'image de son excitation dominante, mais qui ne serait visible pour la conscience (et communicable objectivement) que dans le cas où 'l'autre côté', le monde extérieur, projetterait la même image, en même temps, sur l'écran, et si les deux images, congruentes, se superposaient. [...].

C'est alors qu'une intervention vertigineuse de l'Univers semble être ressentie comme si l'Univers était un double du *sur-moi*, une entité pensante, supérieure.¹⁶⁵

What is fascinating about this passage is that there Bellmer makes a few points that can be considered as the summation of many points made in this chapter about his visual work. One point lies in Bellmer's affirmation of the primordial role objective chance plays in an individual's destiny and life. This is in agreement with surrealist thinking. A second point lies in Bellmer's idea of a projection screen as a meeting point between what lies within the self due to the unconscious and is made visible through its reflection or double in the outside world – Zürn is one such reflection. This is also a reference to psychoanalysis and Freud put in compact terms.

The third point Bellmer makes is most interesting and lies in his use of the term '*sur-moi*' applied to the universe as its double, and in his linking 'le moi' with 'le monde extérieur'. (The universe can be taken as a metaphor for the greater anonymous world which one is inevitably exposed to.) With this Bellmer emphasizes the difference between what one considers as his own world provided by the outside as 'le monde extérieur', and a greater universe upon which one has no control. Through this description of 'le moi et son monde' and 'l'Univers' as a 'double du *sur-moi*, une entité supérieure et pensante', Bellmer comes close to the structure of masochistic fantasy and ego-splitting along the lines of Deleuze's analysis – using Freud's terms.

As I explained earlier, Deleuze explains that in sadism the 'surmoi' remains inside the sadist and the masochistic 'moi' is projected on to the victims. Whereas in masochism, Deleuze describes the ego splitting into a masochistic ego that remains inside the masochist and a super-ego, a 'surmoi' that is projected onto an outside desired other, but only partially. This desired other embodies a super-ego double; an effigy of the super-ego. There exists an exchange between the super-ego on the inside and its outside super-ego double

that seeks to annihilate the former. This super-ego double which in the above passage Bellmer calls 'l'Univers' provides everything that effects Bellmer('s 'moi'), including what causes him pain and produces the experience of violence, as well as reflecting the (sadistic) violence that lies within himself. At the same time Bellmer talks of a projection of 'le moi' and 'son monde extérieur' that meet and superimpose on one another. 'Le monde extérieur' embodies Bellmer's selected, desired part of the universe; not *the* universe. The universe includes Bellmer and 'son monde extérieur'.

Bellmer's 'monde extérieur' is personal and can be taken in expressionist terms (from Kojève¹⁶⁶) as the attitude the artist has towards a chosen quality representing this 'monde' that then comes to represent 'le monde' for Bellmer. This quality can be a love-object: Zürn, or eroticism: what Zürn inspires. Zürn, or eroticism become the part that is raised to the whole along the Hegelian argument put forward by Žižek.¹⁶⁷ That is, some quality or some person from 'le monde extérieur' that find a reflection in Bellmer's 'moi' become the part that represents the whole of this 'monde extérieur'. Bellmer says that the latter is an image of his 'moi' not of his '*sur-moi*'. That is, Bellmer's masochistic ego is embodied by himself and his *own* outer world: 'le moi et son monde extérieur'; representing a narcissistic relation. The latter is a virtual image of, or double for the other. On the other hand 'l'Univers' is not personal, it is superior and Bellmer has no control over it, anymore than he can control his capacity to feel pain and to react with violence against this. The part of Bellmer that inflicts pain, to relive and analyse the body experiencing it, finds its double in a universe that inflicts pain. Bellmer's '*sur-moi*' parodies the '*sur-moi*' that comes from the universe and acts out what this brings with it in his doll-images and in his images of Zürn. The dolls and Zürn are alter-egos, feminine others for Bellmer's 'moi'. That is, they are representations of his 'monde extérieur' and reflections of his masochistic ego. At the same time eroticism, sexual repression, experiences of pain and violence come from the universe that

includes the negative elements in oneself (the sadistic *négatif*). Bellmer admits that the universe is a double for his '*sur-moi*'; that is, for the '*sur-moi*' responsible for the creation of the perverse disturbing stagings of his dolls and of Zürn. (Those embody '*son monde extérieur*', and his '*moi*').

What Bellmer seems to say in the above passage is that his imagination, his inner feelings, and the outer objects that effect and reflect these, obey a masochistic dialectic dependent on fetishism, and on the reliving of pain. However, in the analysis and staging of these masochistic experiences, that become art objects, exhibited in and forming part of the greater universe, and are not just his personal world, the thinking superior part of Bellmer, the part that cannot control his reacting against pain in sadistic fashion; his '*sur-moi*' takes over and produces these images. (I consider this a pseudo-sadism related to masochism, as Deleuze explains, and not pure sadism in Freud's terms.)

Returning to the argument on Bellmer's sadism and masochism: the perverse violent scenes Bellmer produces are due to his sadistic ego, '*sur-moi*'. Therefore these images can be considered as sadism. However, the pertinent question to ask is what do the victims of these images represent for Bellmer, and how does Bellmer relate to them? As I have already established the victims; Bellmer's dolls and Unica Zürn, are love objects to whom he is profoundly attached. Through Freud's statements on narcissism they embody a part of Bellmer. In addition, Bellmer's own words above explain that they represent a projection from what he sees as his outside world that meets with and superimposes itself upon the projection that comes from within himself; his '*moi*'. This then means that Bellmer lives his doll-fantasies and Zürn's images; that is, his creativity personally. Because of the nature of the images these personal fantasies are masochistic. (Again I need to stress here that the theatrical images with dolls I read as masochistic fantasies. The dolls themselves I read as virtual doubles of Bellmer's inner images that are images of pain, and represent a narcissistic love.)

However, on an impersonal level, the artist that produces these doll-images, and dolls needs to sell them to an anonymous world of which he is part, he also needs to become detached from them. Therefore he has to be made up of a '*sur-moi*, une entité pensante supérieur'. Which does not mean that Bellmer's work is sadistic; it simply means that his work reflects a sadistic universe, as he sees it, and that by virtue of this reflection Bellmer is not devoid of some sadism when necessary. Bellmer's sadism is directed towards the universe; that is, in selling his disturbing images of the dolls and Zürn (relating his masochistic fantasies), and in exposing them publicly he is inflicting pain upon and traumatising his spectators, that make up part of this anonymous universe.

Bellmer continues:

La durée d'une étincelle, l'individuel et le non-individuel sont devenus interchangeable et la terreur de la limitation mortelle du moi dans le temps et dans l'espace paraît être annulée. Le néant a cessé d'être; quand tout ce que l'homme n'est pas s'ajoute à l'homme, c'est alors qu'il ressemble à lui-même. Il semble exister, avec ses données les plus singulièrement individuelles, et indépendamment de soi-même, dans l'Univers. C'est à ses instants de 'solution' que la peur sans terreur peut se transformer en ce sentiment d'exister élevé en puissance: paraître participer – même au delà de la naissance et de la mort – à l'arbre, au 'toi' et à la destinée des hasards nécessaires, rester presque 'soi' sur l'autre côté.¹⁶⁸

Bellmer's phrase: 'Il semble exister avec ses données [...] individuelles, indépendamment de soi-même, dans l'Univers', confirms his view of the powerlessness of the individual within this huge universe that exercises its will upon him/her without any consideration for his/her feelings (and induces sadistic feelings; violence in return). Bellmer also brings up a fourth point with his phrase: 'l'individuel et le non-individuel sont devenus interchangeable et la terreur de la limitation mortelle du moi [...] paraît être annulée,' that link the universe via eroticism to ideas of continuity in agreement with Bataille's views

on eroticism:

Nous supportons mal la situation qui nous rive à l'individualité de hasard, à l'individualité périssable que nous sommes. En même temps que nous avons le désir angoissé de la durée de ce périssable, nous avons l'obsession d'une continuité première, qui nous relie généralement à l'être [...].

Mais cette nostalgie commande chez tous les hommes les trois formes de l'érotisme [...] à savoir l'érotisme des corps, l'érotisme des cœurs, enfin, l'érotisme sacré. J'en parlerai afin de bien montrer qu'en elles ce qui est toujours en question est de substituer à l'isolement de l'être, à sa discontinuité, un sentiment de continuité profonde.¹⁶⁹

Bataille's ideas seem to echo Bellmer's lines about the individual's terror of his own isolation and the need to cancel this isolation even for a moment, if possible. Bellmer's words (above), 'quand tout ce qui l'homme n'est pas s'ajoute à l'homme, c'est alors qu'il ressemble à lui-même' imply the need to dissolve oneself in an intense communication with the world (one of Bataille's forms of eroticism is one solution), in order to gain a better understanding of oneself; that is, a clearer image – for Bellmer. In Lacan's terms one needs alienating identification in order to maintain one's narcissism or self-image given by Bellmer's last phrase: 'paraître participer [...] à l'arbre, au "toi" et à la destinée des hasards nécessaires, rester presque "soi" sur l'autre côté.' Bellmer's sudden encounter with Zürn, his recognition of her as the visible outside projection of part of himself, of his dolls (creativity), and his need to communicate with her erotically and artistically does help in his remaining himself: an artist-philosopher using the real female body (his doll come to life) to implement his principle of perversion.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a preliminary discussion of perversion and the fetish. The fetish starts out from an ethnological, shamanic, religious context. It then becomes a perverse object linked to the second primal fantasy, the castration fantasy, and is considered a phallic substitute or compensatory object for the missing phallus in the (seen-as-castrated) feminine other. Although it was the latter meaning that I used in my analysis of Bellmer's dolls and his stagings of them, the original meaning nevertheless has some bearing on the dolls. One of the dolls' functions where Bellmer is concerned – an important one – is in their use as therapeutic and sublimatory objects. Bellmer's dolls are born out of his childhood and as such come to represent a part of him that he painfully leaves behind. Irrespective of how he treats his dolls, of how one interprets his manipulations of the dolls, they remain objects of a desired secure past that has been shattered through his contact with an adult world. His obsessive creation of the dolls that is based upon perversion; upon distorting and dismembering their bodies, is an indication of how he lives and cannot come to terms with pain, emotional loss, trauma. Bellmer repeatedly recreates the experience of violence through his doll-creations.

In this respect, the dolls come to embody fetishism in two senses. They embody fetishism in its original sense; that is, the dolls are shamanic and reassuring objects. These shamanic objects open up a compensatory space for Bellmer to write and fantasize his loss of childhood, his relation to himself, to the other and to the world. In short the dolls open up a space for an expression of personal experiences, and the illustration of their effects – assured that he will meet no resistance from his dolls no matter what he does to them. As a result they become fetishes in the second sense: compensatory objects for his castration fantasy. Bellmer's castration fantasy is primarily emotional and narcissistic. As I explained, it is mostly experiences of pain, revolt, repression, that come to form the writing of Bellmer's perverse body: his dolls. Alongside the expression of such experiences lies a gnawing need to understand – not

experience itself (this I think Bellmer comprehends) – but why one reacts to certain experiences and not to others; or rather which experiences one reacts to and how these effect one's thinking and therefore one's bodily gestures and movements.

This need drives Bellmer to physiologically manipulate his dolls' bodies, often recreating their forms, as well as to cast them in perverse, disturbingly violent scenes in order to discover how the body really reacts; its own language in the face of pain. (Bellmer's version of Antonin Artaud's *Théâtre de la cruauté*.) Then Bellmer photographs them as a record of the effects of pain on the body; that is, as outer physiological states expressing inner psychological states. The compensation comes from Bellmer's ability to put pain on the outside at least temporarily. I continued this chapter with a long-winded discussion on fetishism and castration fantasy, sadism and masochism, according to (less) Freud and (more) Deleuze. I underlined the differences between sadistic thinking and masochistic imagination concluding that Bellmer's doll-stagings come out of masochism. I also concluded that Bellmer's dolls in such scenes represent a fetishism connected to castration fantasy.

Bellmer's dolls come to represent two lacks (via Žižek's reading of Lacan). One lack lies in the subject's perception of himself; that is, the belief of his own impotence, and his susceptibility to castration – which can also be read in the emotional sense. The second lack lies in the subject's perception of the other – and by extension his relation to the world – seen as castrated, threatening, or overpowering. In order to stress both the effects of violence on the dolls and their fetish-status, Bellmer weaves masochistic scenarios of a cruel sadistic world. Due to masochism (strongly related to fetishism) the dolls involve a desexualisation: an ego-ideal that takes place with the suspension of desire.¹⁷⁰ This ego-ideal then becomes resexualised through a narcissistic contemplative gaze: as narcissistic ego. Thus the dolls help Bellmer maintain desire. In many

ways Bellmer's dolls are salvatory therapeutic objects that allow him to come to terms with painful emotions and loss, as well as to overcome his fear of further emotional involvement and erotic experience (of castration).

In the last part of this chapter I discussed how Bellmer creates dolls and then finds a live look-alike whom he semi-substitutes for his dolls: Unica Zürn. I discussed Bellmer's theory on the anatomy of love where the borders between masculine and feminine become fluid, they even become reversed in cases of intense emotional eroticism. From there I went on to discuss Bellmer's relation with Zürn based on his photographs and drawings of her, as well as through her writings about herself and comments on Bellmer. Like his dolls, Zürn offers Bellmer some comfort in the knowledge that she is his willing model-victim. Zürn herself is a victim of a sad and lonely childhood. Her refuge was her imagination. There she reconstructs and fantasizes over masochistic scenes. Later, when Zürn meets Bellmer a special relation forms between them which becomes expressed in his art, and sometimes in Zürn's writings. Zürn's profile is that of the masochistic victim. She embodies a lethargic doll whose incoherent gestures, become more incoherent and dislocated in the last eight years of her life due to an advanced stage of schizophrenia and frequent mental lapses.¹⁷¹ Zürn's mental instability had been initiated during her childhood. Later on, a life of misery and emotional stress takes its toll on her psychological state.

What must have fascinated Bellmer was the awareness that Zürn incarnated the pain he had been trying to express and explore in his dolls through her appearance and gestures. Although Bellmer creates perverse images of Zürn, he did take care of her, coming to her side and supporting her emotionally during her infrequent sanatorium internments. The intense pain in both Bellmer and Zürn is expressed literally in his images of her body. As with his dolls, Bellmer continues to experiment with Zürn's body incapable of appeasing his pain, or of achieving some closure from his traumatic experiences and memories.

In the next chapter I continue with the experience of violence and look at Bellmer's dolls from a completely different perspective: through the writings of Walter Benjamin as an allegorical illustration of modernity's figuration of the feminine. I do this in comparison to other works of art: Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Otto Dix's paintings, as well as through Theodor Adorno's ideas on aesthetics. Bellmer's dolls – along with other works – in the next chapter are read as indicative of a different type of experience of violence removed from the psychological experience of violence that is based upon psychoanalytical perversions as described in this chapter.

Notes

1. Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2002), p.222.
2. Ibid., p.222.
3. Ibid., p.43.
4. Ibid., p.49.
5. Ibid., p.49.
6. Pierre Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion* (Paris: Édition Jean-Faur, 1999), p.287.
7. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1984), p.1.
8. Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Le Fétichisme* (Paris: PUF « Que sais-je? », 1994), p.4.
9. The term was introduced into the Portuguese language in 1552. See *ibid.*, p.11.
10. Ibid., p.5.
11. Ibid., p.21.
12. Ibid., p.44.
13. Ibid., pp.59-61.
14. Ibid., pp.63-4. The words in double brackets are from Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, 1905, quoted by Assoun.
15. Sigmund Freud, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, 1924, in *On Metapsychology*, trans. from German by James Stratchey, ed. by Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1984), pp.413-26.
16. Assoun, *Le Fétichisme*, pp.40-50. Richard von Krafft-Ebing was the first to use Sacher-Masoch's name in association with the perversion of desiring pain for sexual gratification, much to Sacher-Masoch's displeasure. As Deleuze points out, 'Il [Sacher-Masoch] voit donc sans plaisir Krafft-Ebing servir de son nom pour désigner une perversion.' Gilles Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p.8.
17. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, in *On Metapsychology*, p.287.
18. Hans Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2002), pp.22-24.
19. Bellmer explains that his '*petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique* devrait embrasser tout ce qui a été mis à jour par le surréalisme. Outillage, dialectique donnés, bien sûr par Freud.' Quoted in Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.159. Dourthe also lists Bellmer's readings and says: 'Les sources textuelles de *L'Anatomie de l'image* sont multiples et proviennent de domaines variés.' Ibid., pp.127-29.
20. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.23.
21. Ibid., p.23.
22. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.276. Freud quotes G.T. Fechner, *Einige Ideen zur Schöpfungs- und Entwicklungs- geschichte der Organismen*, 1873 ('Notions on the History of Creation and Development of Living Organisms'). The English title of Fechner's work is my loose translation.
23. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.29.
24. Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*, 1888 (*Le Cas Wagner*), quoted in Jean Lacoste, *La Philosophie de l'art* (Paris: PUF, 1981), p.13. Also see Schopenhauer's statement: 'Every true act of his will is also at once and inevitably a movement of his body; he cannot actually will the act without at the same time being aware that it appears as a movement of the body [...].' *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.12-13.
25. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.45. This statement not only sums up Bellmer's whole artistic project; it also helps in reading different aspects of his work. I shall refer to it again.

26. Jaques Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p.16.
27. Assoun, *Le Fétichisme*, p.104.
28. Bellmer states that it is his aim to implement the principle of perversion in his work. See Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p. 287.
29. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 1905, in *On Sexuality*, trans. from German by James Stratchey, ed. by Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1977), pp.71-2.
30. Freud, *The Economic Problem of Masochism*, pp.413-26.
31. Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, pp.66-7.
32. Ibid., pp.66-7.
33. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.29.
34. I need to point out here again that Deleuze's analysis is based on literature; on writings of perversions: sadism and masochism. Bellmer writes his perversion within artworks, as fiction which is the reason behind my choice of a comparative analysis between Bellmer and Deleuze, rather than Freud. How these perversions are lived and transform in real life and clinical cases is a quite different matter.
35. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, pp.33-42.
36. Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme* (Paris: Minuit, 1957), pp.209-10. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.17.
37. Deleuze is discussing Freud's view, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.91.
38. For more discussion on this see Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, pp.89-96.
39. Ibid., p.35. Also see Pierre Klossowski, *Le Souffleur*, in *Les Lois de l'hospitalité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). According to Deleuze there 'on retrouve cette différence de nature entre les deux phantasmes de prostitution, sadique et masochiste'. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.56.
40. Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade* (Paris: Minuit, 1963), p.30.
41. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.45.
42. Ibid., p.22.
43. Ibid., p.26.
44. Ibid., p.22.
45. Ibid., p.22.
46. Ibid., p.16.
47. Ibid., p.21.
48. Ibid., p.22.
49. Ibid., p.22.
50. Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion*, p.1.
51. Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.287.
52. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.45.
53. Ibid., p.45.
54. Roland Barthes quoted in Céline Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le «faire-œuvre perversif», une étude clinique de l'objet* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p.276. See also Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), p.69.
55. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le «faire-œuvre perversif», une étude clinique de l'objet*, p.323.
56. Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.123.
57. Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le «faire-œuvre perversif», une étude clinique de l'objet*, p.276.
58. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.26.
59. Ibid., p.23.
60. Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.159.
61. Ibid., p.126.
62. Ibid., p.159.
63. Ibid., p.159.

64. Ibid. pp.159-61.
65. Bellmer, *Lettre à Polly*, 1957, in *Obliques*, numéro spéciale sur Hans Bellmer (Nyons, Éditions Borderie, 1979) pp.117-19.
66. Ibid., pp.117-19.
67. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, pp.11-14.
68. Alexandre Kojève, *Les Peintures concrètes de Kandinski* (Bruxelles: Éditions La Lettre Volée, 2001), p.23.
69. Jean Clair, *Du surréalisme considéré dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes* (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 2003), p.84.
70. This issue is very complicated and makes one wonder what is the requirement for a work to be surrealist: its imagery, its conception, or by necessity both? An investigation into this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation and my competence – one is free to agree or disagree with Clair's reasoning. Where Bellmer is concerned I agree with Clair.
71. Clair, *Du surréalisme considéré dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes*, p.84.
72. Ibid., p.85.
73. Ibid., p.86.
74. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.45.
75. Waldborg quoted in Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer. The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p.94.
76. Ibid., p.94.
77. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.26.
78. Ibid., p.18.
79. Bernhild Boie, *L'Homme et ses simulacres. Essai sur le romantisme allemand* (Paris: Librairie Corti, 1979), p.173. There Boie discusses Bellmer's obsession with ball joints. Also see Masson, *La Fabrique de la poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le «faire-œuvre perversif», une étude clinique de l'objet, passim*.
80. The uncanny deriving from the animate-inanimate or explosive-fixed is part of what André Breton calls convulsive beauty necessary in surrealist works. André Breton, *L'Amour Fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937), p.26.
81. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.29.
82. Ibid., p.42.
83. Ibid., p.60.
84. Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.224. It is interesting to note Dourthe's use of language regarding Bellmer's attraction to Sade: 'lecture non scientifique de la grammaire sadienne'. Dourthe's phrase emphasizes Bellmer's scientific affiliations where works of art were concerned, which does not apply with Bellmer in Sade's case. Dourthe's idea of a Sadean grammar ties in with Deleuze's ideas on a specific structure where Sade is concerned.
85. Taylor, *Hans Bellmer. The Anatomy of Anxiety*, p.92.
86. Ibid., p.95.
87. Rosalind Krauss, *Bachelors* (Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p.8.
88. Ibid., p.19. The 'preying mantis' aspect has been discussed via Krauss, p.44, with regard to *La Mitrailieuse en état de grâce*, fig. 5.
89. Ibid., p.19. Krauss is exposing a common held view of misogyny in Surrealism.
90. Ibid., p.156. I do not know if one can consider Bellmer's work as 'mainly domestic' out of choice. Some 25% of his Doll photographs are taken outdoors. One reason for taking photographs 'domestically' might be for convenience. Another is that psychological violence and childhood violation often starts within domestic contexts. Also Bellmer did not spend all the years between 1934-1949 in Germany, but in France.
91. Ibid., p.156.
92. Ibid., pp.156-57.
93. Ibid., p.157.
94. Slavoj Žižek, *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes*, in *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p.88.

95. Hal Foster, *Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus*, in *Surrealism. Desire Unbound* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p.215.
96. Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, pp.141-42 (in a footnote added in 1915).
97. Ibid., p.141.
98. Ibid., p.142.
99. Ibid., p.142.
100. Žižek, *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes*, pp.103-4.
101. Ibid., pp.103-4.
102. Krauss, *Bachelors*, p.157.
103. Term taken from Masson's title: *La Fabrique de la Poupée chez Hans Bellmer. Le « faire œuvre perversif », une étude clinique de l'objet*.
104. Žižek, *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes*, pp.103-104.
105. Rabinovitch's term, *Surrealism and the Sacred*, p.222.
106. Žižek, *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes*, pp.92-3.
107. Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors. The Art of Hans Bellmer* (California: The University of California Press, 2001), pp.197-98. Put in the text's footnotes 40-51.
108. Ibid., p.85.
109. Ibid., p.86.
110. Foster, *Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus*, p.208.
111. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, pp.107-8.
112. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel's term quoted by Foster, *Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus*, p.215.
113. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, pp.110-11. This is also a reason for some to read Bellmer's images as mainly sadistic.
114. Ibid., p.108.
115. Ibid., pp.108-9.
116. Ruth Henry, *Rencontre avec Unica*, in Unica Zürn, *Sombre Printemps* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2003), p.101.
117. Zürn participated in several Surrealist exhibitions, she was an artist in her own right.
118. Unica Zürn, *Vacances à Maison Blanche. Derniers écrits et autres inédits*, trad. de l'allemand par Ruth Henri (Paris: Éditions Joelle Losfeld, 2000), pp.45-46.
119. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.68.
120. Jacques Lacan, 'L'agressivité en psychanalyse', 1948, in *Écrits I* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p.102.
121. Ibid., pp.103-4.
122. Ibid., p.104.
123. Bellmer, *La Poupée*, 1934, in *Obliques*, p. 61.
124. Ibid., p.65.
125. Lacan, 'De l'amour à la libido', 1964, in *Les quatre concepts de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p.213.
126. Ibid., pp.212-13.
127. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.18.
128. Unica Zürn, *Sombre Printemps*, trad. de l'allemand par Ruth Henri et Robert de Valançay (Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 2003), p.41.
129. Dourthe, *Hans Bellmer: Le principe de perversion*, p.208.
130. Hans Bellmer, Unica Zürn, *Lettres au Docteur Ferdière* (Paris: Séguier, 1994), pp.63-64.
131. Ibid., p.88.
132. Zürn, *Sombre Printemps*, p.42-43.
133. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.29.
134. Deleuze, *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch. Le froid et le cruel*, p.109.
135. Freud, *On Narcissism*, in *Metapsychology*, p.65.
136. Ibid., p.84.

137. Eroticism here can be intense emotional (pleasure) not just sexual experience in compliance with Georges Bataille's three forms of eroticism. 'Mais cette nostalgie commande chez tous les hommes les trois formes de l'érotisme [...] à savoir l'érotisme des corps, l'érotisme des cœurs, enfin, l'érotisme sacré.' Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, p.22.
138. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.29.
139. Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur du Je', 1949, in *Écrits I*, p.96.
140. Ibid., p.102.
141. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.59.
142. Darian Leader, Groves, Judy, *Lacan for Beginners* (London: Icon Books, 1995), pp.44-49.
143. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.30.
144. Ibid., p.31.
145. Ibid., p.32.
146. Ibid., p.34.
147. Title-part of Lacan's Fourth Concept, 'Le Champ de l'Autre, et Retour sur le transfert', in *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p.225.
148. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, pp.34-35.
149. Ibid., p.36.
150. Ibid., p.38.
151. Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p.211.
152. Ibid., pp.212-213.
153. Ibid., pp.215-16.
154. Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, pp.141-42. I have discussed this earlier in this chapter.
155. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, pp.41-2.
156. During the many times Zürn was interned in psychiatric clinics, Bellmer wrote to her daily sending flowers, chocolates, and crayons encouraging her to draw. See Zürn, *Vacances à Maison Blanche. Derniers écrits et autres inédits*.
157. Zürn, *Sombre Printemps*, pp.11-12.
158. Unica Zürn, *L'Homme-Jasmin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp.15-16. 'Quand enfin, *L'Homme-Jasmin* – achevé en 1966 – paraîtra en traduction à Paris, en 1971, les critiques parleront d'une "découverte". Ils admirent l'exactitude documentaire de cette observation du Moi [...]. Michel Leiris, surpris, considère le livre comme sa "lecture la plus importante de cette année", Ruth Henry in Zürn, *Vacances à Maison Blanche. Derniers écrits et autres inédits*, p.100.
159. Hans Bellmer, Unica Zürn, *Lettres au Docteur Ferdière*, p.85. There are misspelt terms in Bellmer's text and strange punctuation.
160. Ruth Henry in Zürn, *Vacances à Maison Blanche. Derniers écrits et autres inédits*, p.110.
161. Ibid., p.110.
162. Ibid., pp.111-12.
163. Zürn, *L'Homme-Jasmin*, p.17. Zürn was encouraged by Henri Michaux to write this book and Ruth Henry says* that the title refers to Michaux seen by Zürn as an incarnation of her childhood fixation-alter-ego whom Zürn calls *L'Homme-Jasmin* much to Bellmer's jealousy.
- *Ruth Henry, *Rencontre avec Unica*, in *Sombre Printemps*, pp.98-111.
164. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p.45.
165. Ibid., pp.76-78.
166. Kojève, *Les Peintures concrètes de Kandinski*, p. 23.
167. Žižek, *Fetishism and its Vicissitudes*, p.93.
168. Bellmer, *Petite Anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image*, p. 78.
169. Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, p. 22.
170. Deleuze's term, taken from Freud, of ego-ideal is related to the symbolic: whose gaze I desire. This is different to the ideal ego (also Freud's term). One's identifying with someone or something constitutes the ideal ego; one identifying with someone or something *for someone*

specific constitutes the ego ideal. 'In Lacan's formulation of 1953, the ideal ego is the image you assume and the ego ideal is the symbolic point which gives you a place and supplies the point from which you are looked at.' Leader, Groves, *Lacan for Beginners*, p.48.

171. For more on Zürn's illness, internment and suffering see Zürn, *Vacances à Maison Blanche. Derniers écrits et autres inédits*.

PART TWO

THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

CHAPTER THREE

LE CORPS-FEMME & ANGELIC SPACES

PART ONE: THEODOR ADORNO AND WALTER BENJAMIN

Introduction

In the literature on Hans Bellmer (Masson, Lichtenstein, Dourthe, Taylor) – as well as by Bellmer’s admission – the scene of the doll-Olympia’s fragmentation in Jacques Offenbach’s opera *Les Contes d’Hoffmann* is known to have had a strong impact on Bellmer. In the first chapter I briefly discussed this impact and its influence on Bellmer’s creation of the doll in the light of a psychological reading and uncanny resonances, and following the above-mentioned authors. I then went on to a discussion of primal fantasies in an attempt to explain the creation of the doll, its beginnings; that is, how it came about and what influenced its creation. However, in *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno writes:

If art has psychological roots, then they are the roots of fantasy in the fantasy of omnipotence. This fantasy includes the wish to bring about a better world. This frees the total dialectic, whereas the view of art as a merely subjective language of the unconscious does not even touch it.¹

Adorno also makes the point that psychoanalysis is an ‘absolutely subjective sign system’ that ‘unlocks phenomena but falls short of the phenomenon of art.’² In other words deciphering what one sees as psychological elements in artworks might provide certain (invaluable) insights about their authors’ states of mind

but does not explain the works themselves; what really makes such works art. In Bellmer's case projecting suffering, lack, perverse fantasies, outside himself through the construction of a work of art – which is a positive act – gives him the illusion of ridding himself of negative elements by mastering them in the hope for 'a better world' (he is also part of this world), thus freeing 'the total dialectic' made up of the subjective and the universal. Analysing Bellmer's doll through psychoanalysis turns the doll into an object of subjective memory, of personal feelings, which can be reconstructed and deciphered from the work as a reflection of its author's inner psyche, as a psychological state. The omnipotent fantasy, read through art, here takes the form of an external projection to control and liberate. Such fantasy seeks to control and divert into creativity what lies within oneself: pain, perversion, anger, or that which one has to go through because of social and historical conditions. To 'bring about a better world' through art has to do with the relation of an artist to him/herself, to what surrounds him/her, to how he/she identifies with and experiences the world. That is, communicating negative, violent, perverse feelings into artwork (hopefully) relieves an artist of aggression and helps him/her in better relating to the world. These feelings also represent an artist's social commentary on the world. Psychological interpretations are interpretations mediated through subjectivity on the one hand, but they are also a way of offering aesthetic objects as knowledge: of the world (a subjective world) through an artist's personal context. Any artwork is an object among many others and as such belongs to a universal history, as well as to the historical situation into which it is born, from which it originates.

'Every artwork, if it is to be fully experienced, requires thought and therefore stands in need of philosophy, which is nothing but thought that refuses all restrictions. [...]. Emphatically, art is knowledge, though not the knowledge of objects.'³ 'Knowledge of objects' implies data about the manufacture and classification of objects such as when, how, why, where objects were made,

including their provenance: the places they were exhibited in and who owned them. Such data are not strictly speaking art-knowledge; that is, knowledge an object gives off irrespective of data. For Adorno, art as knowledge comes out of the multiple ways of interpreting an object leading to limitless meanings pointing beyond the object itself. Art as a psychological product participates in the quest for art-knowledge, but it is limited and subjective. Reading aesthetic work in purely psychological terms that stress the hermeneutic value of fantasy is not enough according to Adorno. If one starts with the psychological dimension one needs to go beyond that into a deeper interpretation in order to liberate the work's potential to give off real meaning. The type of interpretation or analysis Adorno is talking about is 'ideology-critique'. There an object becomes a site for investigating ideas, their analysis and criticism, as well as how such ideas reveal aspects of and are conducive to change in a society. This then reflects on the object, on its place among other aesthetic objects, and in that society. 'What transcends the reality principle toward something superior is always also part of what is beneath it.'⁴ Adorno's method works by postulating and juxtaposing an imagined truth (what one believes a work depicts) against the (material and social) reality behind it; that is, by employing a 'total dialectic' of illusion-as-truth and reality in order to bring forth hidden qualities for a transformation of thought and perception, for progress and revolution, that are contained within the work. Art as knowledge – in Adorno's sense – forms the basis of my discussion of artworks in this chapter, many of his ideas formulated on aesthetics (that is, by interpreting and analysing ideas through art objects) is one method I use to achieve such knowledge.

In the second chapter I discussed Bellmer's work using psychoanalytical ideas but also basing my interpretation of Bellmer's perverse doll-stagings on Gilles Deleuze's analysis of masochism and its contrast with sadism. Although Deleuze investigates the psychoanalytical theory behind sadism and masochism – mostly that of Sigmund Freud – he bases his study on an analysis of Sade's

and Sacher-Masoch's writings; that is, on literature with psychoanalysis as a comparative discipline. My reading of Bellmer's work using Deleuze's analysis gives his strange doll-stagings a masochistic meaning, and places Bellmer's perverse creativity closer to that of Sacher-Masoch than to Sade's.

If in keeping with Hegel's insight all feeling related to an aesthetic object has an accidental aspect, usually that of psychological projection, then what the work demands from its beholder is knowledge, and indeed, knowledge that does justice to it: The work wants its truth and untruth to be grasped.⁵

The 'accidental aspect' is the subjective feeling one obtains from an aesthetic object. This 'aesthetic hedonism' is a by-product of what is essential to the artwork: knowledge.⁶ Happiness is what Adorno talks about, but discomfort can also be obtained from a work, or any other feeling the work inspires in its beholder. These feelings can only be accidental because they are of a psychological nature and the beholder usually sees them not as his own but as belonging to the work; they are seen (rightly or wrongly) as the unconscious or conscious meaning an artist expresses through his work. Adorno stresses that where artworks are concerned they should be seen within a social context as a means of ideology-critique; that is, through a constructive criticism of the ideas (social, political, material) upon which one judges them to be based. Furthermore their creation is dialectical since artworks bear a dual oppositional reading: 'in terms of their relation to the world and in terms of art's repudiation of that world'.⁷ That is, artworks belong to the world as physical, material objects; they speak in its language which makes them part of the world. At the same time they seek to express alternative worlds which represent their refusal of the actual world, or their revolt against it.

An explanation of artworks based on psychoanalysis cannot be adequate, let alone correct because it is reductive, subjective, points to a limited personal world, and does not allow the work to breathe its own life. Even though the

psychoanalytical elements I discuss in my second chapter borrow from and are combined with a philosophical-literary analysis, this provides narrative or some subjective interpretation. My reading there is about the artist's presumed intentions – his narrative – expressed through his work and reconstructed from: Deleuze, Sacher-Masoch, Freud. The works I discuss there are not open to multiple meanings nor is the meaning obtained irrespective of the works' author. Meaning converges in one-direction: perversion, its symptoms, and the underlying psychoanalytical readings. There meaning also depends on the work's content at the expense of form and technique for this meaning. For example, Bellmer's photographs of broken dolls in strange positions along with his admission of instilling the principle of perversion in his work mean: masochistic fantasy – in my reading. This is the illusion given by the work. It is its fiction, or in Adorno's words its 'untruth' which is just as necessary as its truth. Its 'truth' must include tangible reality such as what the work says about its position in the world of objects, about some universal quality derived from the particular in the image, rather than the artist's feelings and personal conditions. Subject matter is inseparable from artworks, but it is not what gives the work its truth. The truth lies in how the subject matter is structured and the media used to communicate this structure and subject matter.

Each epoch brings with it changes in ways of thinking, perception, language, methods of narration, material. For example – perversion apart – Bellmer's doll photographs represent changes made in the field of aesthetics because of the use of new technology such as photography and the materials out of which the doll is made, including any clothing she wears. There also arises the question of the doll as one representation of the female figure as a social phenomenon, irrespective of Bellmer's personal intentions and his feelings. As I discuss in this chapter Bellmer's doll represents a new perception of femininity; it represents femininity as a human condition with the advent of modernity and the avant-garde. (Obviously Bellmer is not alone in this. It is a sign of the time with

artists such as Balthus, Matisse, Klossowski, Picasso, to name a few, depicting a modern feminine.)

‘The historical moment is constitutive of artworks; authentic artworks are those that surrender themselves to the historical substance of their age without reservation and without the presumption of being superior to it. They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch; this not least of all establishes their relation to knowledge. [...] this makes them incommensurable with historicism which [...] reduces them to their external history.’⁸ Historicism reduces artworks to the data of art history. Thus one historiographical fact – in Bellmer’s work for one – is the use of photography as artwork; ‘technical reproduction’ in Walter Benjamin’s words. According to Benjamin, art that depends on technical reproduction incurs the loss of authenticity and uniqueness that are part of exclusively handmade objects. With this loss the value of art comes to reside to a greater extent in its exhibition-and-economic value rather than its ritualistic or cultic values. In other words, technical reproduction promotes art that serves the political, the materialistic, and hardly ever includes spiritual or altruistic purposes.⁹ Other historiographical facts include the use of new materials and different processes for constructing the artwork. All of these are truth-bearing witnesses of moments in a rapidly changing epoch; not only that, but each element by itself carries its own meanings which are modified or transformed when put together to form the work – and its fiction (the illusion given by its content).

This aspect of taking elements separately and adding them to give meaning constitutes what is called a nonorganic (avant-gardiste) work as opposed to an organic work where each element is relevant to the whole.

A comparison of the organic and nonorganic (avant-gardiste) work of art from a production-aesthetic point of view finds essential support in [...] the first two elements of Benjamin’s allegory. [...]. Artists that produce organic work [...] we shall refer to them as ‘classicists’ [...]. The

classicist correspondingly treats the work of art as a whole, whereas the avant-gardiste tears it out of the life totality, isolates it, and turns it into fragment. [...] The organic work intends the impression of wholeness. To the extent that the individual elements have significance only as they relate to the whole, they always point to the work as a whole as they are perceived individually. In the avant-gardiste work [...] the individual elements have a much higher degree of autonomy and can therefore also be read and interpreted individually or in groups without its being necessary to grasp the work as a whole.¹⁰

The ‘first two elements of Benjamin’s allegory’ Bürger talks about above are: the ‘allegorist pulls one element of the totality of the life context, isolating it, depriving it of its function,’ and ‘the allegorist joins the isolated reality fragments and thereby creates meaning. This is posited meaning; it does not derive from the original context of the fragments.’¹¹ Benjamin’s allegory through element isolation or quotation to transform original meaning and the fragmentation that comes with it constitute an experience of violence which forms a major part of my discussion in this chapter. One of the aims of this chapter is to produce meaning, and hence knowledge by looking at works of art that are nonorganic; where elements can be isolated, where meaning can be posited by joining different fragments of individual work together, and where fragmentation itself has its own significant meaning. Processes involving isolation of elements, of fragmentation, of the placing of these fragments and elements elsewhere, are forms of quotation which according to Benjamin imply textual violence. I therefore discuss nonorganic works showing how these can be analysed to produce and posit meaning through Benjamin’s ideas as an experience of violence in more detail in the course of this chapter, in particular in Claudio Parmiggiani’s work.

Benjamin’s critical thought is so intimately bound up with its object that one might rightly say that the objects themselves dictate to him the method of their critical representation. Where object and method converge in the process of representation, the concept of method [...] loses its

conventional meaning insofar as method is never just method, never a means in relation to ends or a path toward a goal. [...] In the final analysis, the exclusivity with which Benjamin's thought attends to the primacy of representation leads to a form of objectlessness. His thought is, to use one of Adorno's music-theoretical concepts, as 'athematic' as it is concrete.¹²

Many of Benjamin's writings – as I shall discuss – are witness to his singular way of seeing things. Benjamin shows that objects are linked to the world in many unexpected ways; all one needs to do is to look deeply and widen one's perspectives; the obvious is not always the right path to knowledge. Adorno held Benjamin's thinking in high esteem but differed with him on several issues.¹³ Benjamin's way of using a mixture of elements and ideas to expose what is essential increases one's awareness of objects and the context (time and place) in which they are situated. Adorno starts by exposing and analysing elements that are directly relevant to his final aim: the analysis of the work as a criticism of its time. I need to stress however that this chapter is neither about Benjamin nor Adorno; it is about artworks and choices of interpretation. I choose from both these thinkers ideas that serve as a vehicle to finding and extracting meaning from a limited selection of artworks. Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas are extremely important in any discussion of artworks today. For this reason I start with a brief introduction of their ideas including some ideological differences between them relevant to my discussion of chosen artworks. I then analyse these artworks using ideas from Benjamin and Adorno in my analysis. Adorno and Benjamin approach objects of knowledge from different perspectives, both with the aim of gaining knowledge about the world from its objects. As Richard Wolin's states, 'either position [Adorno's or Benjamin's] if taken in isolation ultimately proves self-defeating. Each requires the other as its complement.'¹⁴ In addition Adorno's remark on the debate between him and Benjamin, ('Both positions are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up'),¹⁵ makes some investigation into the differences

between them – in particular their views on art – very useful and interesting.

Benjamin's writings contain two separate threads of thought. One is theological based upon the Torah, Kabbalistic readings, religious texts (including religious works of art). Another is based upon Benjamin's Marxist readings – influenced by his friendship with Bertold Brecht to some extent. Both strands come together in many of his texts. As Christine Buci-Glucksmann aptly puts in *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque*:

Ainsi donc, à travers ce parcours de l'imaginaire – du tableau, de l'allégorie, de l'image dialectique, du fantasme –, l'Ange a donné à voir le non-visible, l'inconscient de la modernité. Quelque chose qui touche à une violence non maîtrisable, un au-delà ou un en deçà des médiations politiques. Dans sa tentative de dialectiser et de faire voir l'irraison, de pénétrer avec la «hache affilée de la raison» dans des territoires et des zones limites, Benjamin a été contraint à mettre en œuvre deux langages et deux mondes. L'un, politique et marxiste, relève de la dialectique comme lieu d'affrontement où le point de vue, la praxis des vaincus, s'opposent sans fin à la souveraineté gouvernante et opprressive des vainqueurs. Fût-ce dans l'anonymat silencieux d'une histoire à récrire. L'autre, le monde complémentaire de Kafka ou de Klee, celui du «nain théologique», celui de l'Ange, est non dialectique. Il indique l'interruption de l'histoire, la catastrophe, l'inhumain et la déhiscence-déperdition du sujet. Il nous donne à penser le côté archaïque et barbare de nos sociétés civilisées, la «teneur chosale» des grandes villes, de la politique-masse, des États-fourmilières, des bureaucraties modernes. Il est la préhistoire d'une histoire que Marx annonçait mais que le «messianisme devenu faible» de Benjamin cherchait.¹⁶

The profane thread that forms one of Benjamin's two worlds is a political Marxist-materialist world of dialectical thinking in which the strong use the body of the weak to trample on, and for their own profit. One figure that Benjamin chooses as metaphor and reality to illustrate this historical materialism of victor and vanquished is the female-figure, in particular the prostitute. He discusses this tragic figure of femininity at length in several of his essays including: *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*

(1938-40, *Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme*), *Das Passagen Werk* (1940, *The Arcades Project*), *Paris die Hauptstadt des XIX Jahrhunderts* (1935 & 1939, *Paris, le capitale du XIXe siècle*). On the other hand, the theological thread opens up an angelic space of illumination, that of the Angel of History that throws messianic light on the modern unconscious and permits insight into the invisible. This Angel points to the moments of decline in history and its progression in a negative sense that accumulates with time as one big catastrophe. Benjamin's Angel makes mankind aware of the uncivilised, de-humanised, savage aspect of modern advanced society. These two figures, the feminine and the Angel belong to Benjamin's 'archéologie du moderne'¹⁷ sometimes overlapping in his work. Through these figures Benjamin's main concepts, including redemption, dialectical images, allegory, ambiguity, come into play.

It is with these two figures in mind, the modern feminine and the Angel, that I choose and discuss the works in this chapter which is divided into three parts. The first part includes this introduction followed by a discussion of Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas relevant to the artworks I look at here. Benjamin's ideas recur in many of his writings often differently stated and within varied contexts. I will therefore concentrate on the concepts themselves and choose from Benjamin's writings what I feel appropriate to my readings, citing, defining and discussing them as I go along – whether in English or in French translation. I will often refer to Adorno's ideas to provide a complementary view. In Adorno's case I concentrate on ideas from *Ästhetische Theorie* (1969; posthumous, *Aesthetic Theory*) as well as from some of Adorno's responses to Benjamin's ideas from *Correspondance. Adorno ↔ Benjamin 1928-1940*.

In the second part I investigate what Buci-Glucksmann calls Benjamin's 'arcanes du féminin'; Benjamin's methodology of 'dessiner comme un *Trauerspiel* du corps-femme de la modernité'¹⁸ in artworks that contain 'le corps-femme de la modernité' and meet with his criteria of allegory, ambiguity, dialectical-image. I start by analysing as allegorical fragment the doll-Olympia

from Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* relating her figure to ideas from Benjamin's writings on allegory, myth, language, as well as correspondences, memory, integrated and immediate experience, mainly drawn from *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. Looking at *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* provides an insight into a particular portrait of the beginnings of femininity as a social metaphor for alienation. The opera's stories furnish good examples of female-figures as allegorical *Trauerspiel* (tragic drama) and creatures of modernity, thus forming an appropriate link with later works such as Otto Dix's (1891-1969) figuration of the feminine and Bellmer's dolls as '*Trauerspiel du corps-femme de la modernité*'. I also discuss Benjamin's ideas on traces contrasted with Adorno's traces, memory and types of experience, Baudelairean correspondences, which are all relevant to the analysis of my chosen artworks here – indeed to all artworks.

In the third part of this chapter I leave figurations of the feminine and the body and turn to a discussion of an immaterial and nonorganic world that is based upon traces, spirit, memory, time; that is, visual figurations of what the artist imagines lies beyond and surrounds man's body, and constitutes an experience of violence. The works I choose are all by Claudio Parmiggiani (1943-). My analysis of Parmiggiani's work is largely based upon his writings. I also relate his work to ideas from Benjamin's world of angels and angelic spaces, to Adorno and to Gianni Vattimo. Benjamin sees the realm of the Angel of History as that of the interruption of history, of catastrophe, of the loss of the subject. These ideas were inspired by Paul Klee's (1879-1940) painting *Angelus Novus* (1920) which Benjamin bought in 1921 and considered his most prized possession. Parmiggiani is one of the contemporary artists whose work contains several Benjaminian references, and lends itself to an alternative Adornian reading. Furthermore, Parmiggiani's work provides the perfect alternative 'angelic', spiritual, mental world to that of corporality and the '*Trauerspiel du corps-femme de la modernité*' of Hoffmann, Dix, and Bellmer.

Preliminary Considerations: Benjamin and Adorno

Both fiction and its other in an artwork are important. That is, ‘untruth’ is according to Adorno just as necessary as ‘truth’ because it is that which leads to the knowledge that stems out of the work and to what Adorno calls ‘spirit’.

Spirit in artworks is posited by their structure, it is not something added from outside. This is responsible in no small way for the fetish character of artworks: Because their spirit emerges from their constitution, spirit necessarily appears as something-in-itself, and they are artworks only insofar as spirit appears to be such. Nevertheless artworks are, along with the objectivity of their spirit, something made. Reflection must equally comprehend the fetish character, effectively sanction it as an expression of its objectivity, and critically dissolve it. To this extent an art-alien element, which art senses, is admixed to aesthetics. Artworks organize what is not organized. They speak on its behalf and violate it; they collide with it by following their constitution as an artifact. The dynamic that each artwork encapsulates is what is eloquent in it. One of the paradoxes of artworks is that, though they are dynamic in themselves, they are fixated, whereas it is only by being fixated that they are objectivated.¹⁹

The ‘untruth’ in artworks lies in the narrative given by each artist’s unique manner of relating and constructing this narrative. (For example a female figure by Picasso is not the same as one by Artemisa Gentileschi, Velázquez, Matisse, Sherman – not only because of style. With every representation each artist depicts different feminine qualities that are in turn linked to a social reality, as well as to each artist’s personal relation to the feminine as his/her narrative.)

The element most responsible in drawing attention to works is ‘spirit’, for Adorno. ‘Spirit’ lies somewhere between the artist’s method of relating fiction (representing his version) and the underlying reality the work breathes.

Adorno’s ‘spirit’ is what gives the artwork its life: the feeling and intellectual belief that it is art. ‘Spirit’ is integrated unconsciously in the work’s construction lending credence to Sigfried Gideon’s phrase ‘la construction assume le rôle du subconscient’²⁰ (of the work). That is, ‘spirit’ represents the movement and life

Benjamin's theory of redemption, historical materialism and 'dialectics at a standstill':

L'histoire universelle n'a pas d'armature théorique. Elle procède par addition: elle mobilise la masse des faits pour remplir le temps homogène et vide. L'historiographie matérialiste, au contraire, est fondée sur le principe constructif. La pensée n'est pas seulement faite du mouvement des idées, mais aussi de leur blocage. Lorsque la pensée s'immobilise soudain dans une constellation saturée de tensions, elle communique à cette dernière un choc qui la cristallise en monade. L'historien matérialiste ne s'approche d'un objet historique que lorsqu'il se présente à lui comme un monade. Dans cette structure il reconnaît le signe d'un blocage messianique des événements, autrement dit le signe d'une chance révolutionnaire dans le combat pour le passé opprimé. Il saisit cette chance pour arracher une époque déterminée au cours homogène de l'histoire; il arrache de même à une époque telle vie particulière, à une œuvre d'une vie tel ouvrage particulier.²⁵

Universal history proceeds chronologically adding events, one after the other. As a result, artefacts follow categories of classifications and divisions according to the time and place of their fabrication, and to style. This methodology as a way of object-knowledge is inadequate, for Benjamin and Adorno. Objects are historical (belonging to a particular moment in history) and historiographic (a writing of history) in that they are miniature world-units: monads, upon which a given moment of history, and human experiences are frozen. Historical objects include literature, artworks, architecture, fashion, film, photography. Such objects are capable of drawing attention to themselves, of *directing their gaze* at the spectator because they contain multiple constellations of meanings unified in one object that await to be liberated through their readings. What these objects contain is dynamic, yet it is fixed by virtue of their structure. They reflect the concept of history Benjamin is expressing; history as an accumulation of events that coagulate at one singular moment when one stops to look at them. Art-works, architecture, literature, monuments, among other forms of creativity represent this blockage of a linear history as halted accumulation, as palimpsest,

at a later epoch. Therefore, the task of extracting *the* event, object, or work to be salvaged from history and oblivion becomes the duty of the materialist historian, for Benjamin.

Adorno engages critically with the work from its time-perspective seeing what was considered as its novelty becoming the past in the work during its own time; that is, Adorno sees works in decline. (On a material level, for example, a painter paints the latest fashion hat. Even before the painter has finished this painting the hat is *démodé* and new hats have come out.) Benjamin looks for elements of the past in the present that link it to the past:

L'histoire est l'objet d'une construction dont le lieu n'est pas le temps homogène et vide, mais le temps saturée d'«à-présent». Ainsi, pour Robespierre, la Rome antique était un passé chargé d'«à-présent», qu'il arrachait de l'histoire. La Révolution française se comprenait comme une seconde Rome. Elle citait l'ancienne Rome exactement comme la mode cite un costume d'autrefois. La mode sait flairer l'actuel, si profondément qu'il se niche dans les fourrés de l'autrefois.²⁶

Benjamin sees the past charged with an actuality which the present is constantly looking back to as an ideal to borrow from. The present pinpoints what it deems as *the* past-image, past-event, to incorporate within itself, to appropriate as its own actuality. For instance, the French Revolution chooses to appropriate Ancient Rome from history. The image chosen from there is that of power with its factors of tyranny and domination. This results in the repetition of tyranny and the rise of a dominating class as the French Revolution's ideal. In other words, the wrong example from the past has been redeemed and all that has changed is the epoch; not social hierarchy or political ideology. The point Benjamin makes is that one needs to look at the evils that tyranny produces not to its greatness, and remember the right example from the past in order to learn from it and change the present. Benjamin deems it necessary to make 'un saut dialectique' in the past, in agreement with Marx's concept of revolution.²⁷ This is the object of Benjamin's redemptive critique. Where historical objects, texts,

artworks are concerned the philosopher, allegorist, art critic, need to fragment the object under scrutiny and reduce it to ruins in order to extract meaning and salvage the relevant events from drowning into oblivion. Only then can the truth that objects bear shine through and be redeemed, according to Benjamin. Redemptive critique means that through the analysis that decomposes such works and breaks up the (myth of the) totality of works the essence and true ideas behind the rhetoric and theatricality of the works are saved and conserved. The true idea behind a work can be a spiritual, a sacred, or a religious ideal that needs to be extracted from man's (profane) creativity, it can be a past historical event, it can be buried memory. Redemption is central to Benjaminian thought.

In Adorno's case it is not redemption in itself of the event, or of a particular knowledge that is important in this process of looking at an object, but what this event or knowledge makes us learn about the world, and the extent with which this awakens our critical consciousness and produces truth about our socio-historical condition. In *Minima Moralia*, 1951, Adorno has this to say on redemption:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own

impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.²⁸

According to Adorno at times of impending doom, of tragedy, it is necessary to consider everything around us as happening for a worthwhile reason: usually for the access to deeper knowledge concerning our existence. To gain access to this reason one must tear at the fabric of events, occurrences, and things. It is only through this search for a reason which in itself is an impossible task that one stumbles upon knowledge, one learns something about existence. Without this hope for the redemption of a reason, of a moral from tragic events even if unrealistic, one can give up thinking and fall into an abyss where no knowledge can be gained about things. With redemption in mind progress can be made. In the end it is the belief in redemption that helps whereas the actual reality of its existence does not count. Adorno explains that the attempt to free thinking from all constraints including its own, is by definition a constraint. The opening up of the process of thought beyond any boundaries is in itself the imposition of a boundary on the process of thought. Adorno's phrases: 'Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be [...] indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives [...] is the task of thought', stress the need to think from various angles, to recreate, to rethink the world under different forms – however strange. These ideas find an eloquent voice in artworks among other manmade objects.

Benjamin and Adorno were very close friends. They greatly respected each other's thinking. Their aims are similar but they seem to differ in methodology and on other related issues. Several of these differences are openly discussed between them in *Briefe: Adorno-Benjamin 1928-1940 (Correspondance: Adorno-Benjamin 1928-1940)*. Adorno's letter to Benjamin: no.39 (dated 2, 4, and 5.8.1935) is just one example of Adorno's admiration for Benjamin and their differences. There Adorno expresses his views on Benjamin's essay, *Paris*,

die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts, 1935, and Benjamin's ideas on dialectical images, ambiguity, commodities, fetish. This essay is important because it illustrates Benjamin's singular way of seeing history and his analysis of it. Another reason for the essay's relevance is that themes discussed by both philosophers there such as: dialectical images, traces, ambiguity, new and old, will be relevant to my analysis of artworks and are themes that I will return to repetitively. I discuss the relevant points in the essay before going on to Adorno's comments on it.

In *Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, Benjamin quotes Michelet: 'Chaque époque rêve la suivante,'²⁹ and makes the point that new methods of production (that form products including artefacts, literature, artworks) cannot escape the past: the new exists together with the old in collective consciousness. There is the incessant need to put away the past or rewrite it as future; to take what is already there – elements of the past and present – and recreate new forms that spell progress and seek to sever ties with the old. For Benjamin this desire to cut off the past by creating new forms is a universal tendency that stems from the beginnings of man's history; from time immemorial. It is nothing new. At the same time there is a nostalgic desire for the return of a primal past where no social hierarchy existed. In other words, in the modern lies an ambition to create a better future shared by mankind where well-being and affluence are accessible social conditions. This would eventually and ideally lead to a classless society – as in primitive society. This desire to do away with the past while dreaming a progressive future modelled after an idyllic primal past can only find its utopian fulfillment as a dream through the objects man creates.³⁰

The past is looked at as the place of a desirable *once upon a time* but also as imperfect and in need of renovating and perfecting. Past traces of the desirable and the undesirable are left in everything that comes after them. Past traces inhabit the present-future in the same manner that man leaves his traces in the

places where he dwells and on the objects he possesses, as well as being himself marked by these places and objects in return. 'Habiter signifie laisser des traces. Dans l'intérieur, celles-ci sont mises en valeur. On invente quantité de housses et de taies, de gaines et d'étuis, où les objets les plus quotidiens laissent leurs traces. Les traces de l'habitant, elles aussi, s'impriment dans son intérieur.'³¹

The multitude of such traces and their accumulation in time together with the once-upon-a-time nostalgia makes erasing the past wishful thinking, especially as this need for an erasure along with nostalgia always existed in the past in every society. The past always reappears, often in its most ancient or primal forms within the new.

In *Das Passagen-Werk* Benjamin defines primal forms and primal history:

'Primal history [*Urgeschichte*] of the nineteenth century' – this would be of no interest if it were understood to mean that forms of primal history are to be recovered among the inventory of the nineteenth century. Only where the nineteenth century would be presented as originary form of primal history [...] only there does the concept of a primal history of the nineteenth century have meaning.³²

In other words the nineteenth century should be regarded as an origin of primal history; as the point from which one becomes fully aware of the past.

Simultaneously the nineteenth century should also be considered as a conceptual repetition of primal history; as a beginning carrying nineteenth-century traces forward into the future. One reason for this is that the primal history forms Benjamin talks about in his essay on Paris and in *Das Passagen-Werk* are neither purely historical nor ideological. They are dialectical images; that is, imaginary images (*Ausdruck*) simultaneously semantic and visual expressions of society where an interpenetration of old and new exists incessantly in the social imaginary and psyche.³³

The point Benjamin stresses is that at given moments of history (the Baroque, the nineteenth century) which appear as turning points in the history of mankind;

that is, during moments of rupture with the past, of new discoveries, and of new forms of expression, there lies an illusion that the past has disappeared. This illusion is false since the past leaves traces that can never be erased and unexpectedly reappear later – within these very new forms. In this sense the nineteenth century is an origin of primal history: from its standpoint one looks back and is more aware of the past. Its motifs forcibly remind one of the past either as rupture or through innovation.

Mais c'est précisément la modernité qui invoque toujours l'histoire la plus ancienne. Elle le fait ici à travers l'ambiguïté qui caractérise les rapports et les produits sociaux de cette époque. L'ambiguïté est l'image visible de la dialectique, la loi de la dialectique au repos. Ce repos est utopie, et l'image dialectique, par conséquent, image de rêve. C'est une telle image qu'offre la marchandise dans sa réalité première: comme fétiche. [...]. C'est une telle image qu'offre la prostituée, à la fois vendeuse et marchandise. [...] La nouveauté est une qualité indépendante de la valeur d'usage de la marchandise. Elle est à l'origine de l'illusion inhérente aux images produites par la conscience collective.³⁴

In Benjamin's eyes modernity conjures up ancient elements of history. Ambiguity arises between objects produced and their status in modern society. Existing objects change meaning and function.³⁵ New objects are produced often continuing on from past achievements. (Photography develops into film, while still remaining photography for example.) Consumer-goods are turned into objects of desire, into fetishes. Human objects of desire such as prostitutes become consumer goods. Prostitutes are characterised by ambiguity since there is a confusion of values between what they are in reality – human beings – their desirability as erotic objects, and their economic-value – objects of monetary profit or loss – accompanied by a constant displacement from one to the other. The same applies to passages, and other products of modernity in terms of the displacement of their values. At the same time this displacement is brought to a tense halt within these products. Such products of modernity come to represent

what Benjamin calls dialectical images at a standstill, they are dream-images part reality, part illusion. The illusion lies in the belief in an absolute novelty that is forward-looking, whereas the reality is that there is no absolute novelty, everything has its origins in some past, in repetition, in memories.

This is what gives rise to dialectical images: the illusion of novelty coupled with the reality that there is no absolute novelty. Thus in modernity novelty provides the base for dialectical images. ‘Comme l’allégorie au XVIIe, la nouveauté devient au XIXe siècle le canon des images dialectiques.’³⁶ Only here, what Benjamin means by novelty is the need to produce new objects and forms – which does not necessarily mean that these are devoid of past traces. The need for novelty, the desire to excel over the past, to outdo and erase it, turn nineteenth-century novelty-based dialectical images into dream and wish images. In the race for novelty values are set aside. Modern society’s only concern is to amaze, invent, shock. However invention comes out of the collective psyche which – even if it forgets its most recent past – cannot divorce itself from its primordial past, from memories. Just like the Baroque thrived on the allegorical, modernity thrives on novelty in its wish for progress, for triumphing over the past, in the glorious dream of making new history. (Even when modernity does not literally borrow from the past it has to take the past as its point of departure, as a comparison, in order to be new and not imitate nor repeat that past.)

In *Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, Benjamin continues, underlining that each epoch not only points back to some prehistory; it also anticipates its post-history. Each epoch wants to outdo the past, and does this with the intention of producing for posterity. Modernity inspires dream-images and brings with it technological advances. With technology comes the need for practicality and the awakening from the dream; products have to be made to sell.³⁷ For example paintings that were once confined to the museum’s walls as icons and dream-images to be visited and admired are brought into the public

arena to be used as money-producing sources through the new technology of photo-reproduction: postcards, posters, in books and catalogues. The paintings are reproduced as consumer-good images, their cultic value has been displaced onto their saleability. Technological progress brings with it the end or rather the decline of an era: decline in originality, aura, dreams. Such objects then become spaces for dialectical materialism. They offer themselves to be used for profit – material, political, propaganda – rather than for inspiring altruistic feelings. In this sense as they progress from their original (cultic, inspirational) value, this original value declines. In turn, progress and decline bring with them the shock-like awakening which Benjamin calls historical awakening. The deliberately conscious exploitation of wish-images, of dream-images for economic purposes forms the dialectical thinking that induces this historical awakening. Dialectical thinking in the present which involves dreaming the future brings about the need to awaken from the dream in order to build this future; it brings the dream to an end and turns it into the ruins from which the process of history can be better understood.³⁸

This is emphasized in Benjamin's words:

Historical 'understanding' is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood; and what has been recognised in the analysis of the 'afterlife of works', in the analysis of 'fame', is therefore to be considered the foundation of history in general. [...].

Overcoming the concept of 'progress' and overcoming the concept of 'period of decline' are two sides of one and the same thing.³⁹

Benjamin's above statements add meaning to the idea that 'chaque époque révèle la suivante'. It implies that those who dream the future seek to construct in the present for a twofold posterity. One posterity where works are created that ensure the present survives in future epochs, through objects, discoveries, knowledge, political decisions, that make *their present* remembered, famous, and referred back to (as historical origin). The second through the creation of

works upon which the future can build and advance forming the continuity of historical progress. The continuity of history represents progress while the referring back to history as an origin (for posterity) represents a 'period of decline' (that needs to be overcome for progress to take place). Within this large picture objects associated with these processes change their original values in the name of progress that is also a decline.

Benjamin's concept of decline differs from Adorno's. Decline lies in this looking back, remembrance, survival of the past in the present as origin for Benjamin. (Overcoming) decline also takes place within intervals: it is a time-process that is not immediate. For Adorno the present is quickly becoming past, rapidly in decline. In Adorno's letter (2-5 August 1935) discussing the *Paris Exposé*, Adorno first praises Benjamin's,

[...] superbe passage où vous [Benjamin] dites qu'habiter c'est laisser des traces, les énoncés fort décisifs sur la collection et sur la manière dont les choses se délivrent de la malédiction d'être utiles. [...] Je trouve pleinement réussi l'interprétation du poète dans l'ébauche du chapitre sur Baudelaire et l'introduction de la catégorie de la nouveauté.⁴⁰

Adorno then goes to the heart of the matter; starting with Michelet's quotation he argues:

Chaque époque rêve la suivante, un précieux outil [...] dans la mesure où se cristallisent autour d'une telle formule les thèmes d'une théorie de l'image dialectique qui me paraissent fondamentalement tomber sous le coup de la critique, car précisément non-dialectiques; de sorte qu'on pourrait réussir à épurer la théorie elle-même en éliminant la formule en question. Car elle implique trois sortes de choses: la conception de l'image dialectique comme un contenu de conscience – fût-il collectif; sa mise en rapport linéaire, je dirais presque évolutionniste, avec l'avenir en tant qu'utopie; la conception de «l'époque» saisie précisément comme un sujet unifié relevant de ce contenu de conscience.⁴¹

According to Benjamin every moment of history represents a dialectical image,

since it contains progress and decline; it dreams and anticipates the future while remembering or holding onto remnants of the past. These past-fragments, due to the accumulation of traces left by past-generations, become embedded and buried within the collective unconscious. Hence in dreaming and striving for future glory every historical epoch carries forward traces of some past but considers itself as an origin. In this respect historical moments are dialectical images. Adorno, however, is not convinced that a present or epoch dreaming its future forms a dialectical image. For one if an epoch dreams its future this links it to the unconscious (via the dream element). Dialectical images cannot be dream-images since dreams imply a strong – if not complete – dependence on the unconscious and collective memory. Dreams belong to the unconscious. This fact contradicts dialectics which in Adorno's view is an intellectual process requiring absolutely lucid analytical thinking. Therefore, dreams and dialectics do not go together. (As discussed earlier, Benjamin does talk of historical awakening to fulfill dreaming the future, only this happens through the shock of a sudden confrontation with reality realising the need for practicality – which is different to starting out with lucid and critical thinking for a purpose: future posterity.) Secondly 'la suivante' points to chronology, to a developing linear process. Again this is in contradiction with dialectics. There one element is juxtaposed against another to produce a dialectical image. Dialectical systems are not based on linearity but on contradictory juxtaposition. Implied linearity or chronological evolution contradicts the notion of history as progress and decline. For Adorno, every epoch can be looked at dialectically or juxtaposed dialectically with the one before or after, or even with another epoch, to achieve a better understanding and criticism of that epoch – not in terms of progress as a chronological historical advance or as one epoch dreaming another. Thirdly, an epoch seen as a unified event coming out of collective consciousness cannot be correct. An epoch is not a result of consciousness rather it effects, influences, and stimulates the latter.

Adorno continues explaining that commodity fetishism belongs to and is transformed with each epoch, whereas Benjamin states that the dialectical image as utopia and dream image creates commodities that are objects of desire and fetishes: they borrow from the past while seeking the future. Adorno sees commodity fetishism as one of the epoch's symptoms. It activates consciousness as to what drives desire, what causes and produces dreams.⁴² This dream is not identical with the dialectical image as Benjamin states; it is its cause and effect. For this reason the dream or wish that is bound to the dialectical image has to be extracted and analysed dialectically in order to better understand human consciousness. Both thinkers are arguing similar objectives somewhat differently. For Benjamin dreams produce objects that are dialectical images at a standstill, frozen desires exuding dynamic meaning. For Adorno the effect these objects have are the dreams that need to be analysed dialectically; that is, the reasons why objects are desirable need analysis.

Adorno proceeds with his linear description of history: the ancient is not renewal but addition and hence non-dialectical. Regarding the archaic and recent past these are reproduced in what comes later, in the form of ruins annihilated by catastrophe. Adorno agrees with Benjamin's ideas on this subject in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1926, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*).⁴³ There Benjamin explains that every epoch borrows from a past that is fragmented. The reason for this fragmentation is due to the fact that more of the past is buried and forgotten than is remembered. Furthermore, the remembered fragments have been snatched out of their original context and forcibly inserted into another, far removed, later context. These fragments or quotations from the past, from the archaeology of history, appear as the salvaged remnants of some earthquake because of what has been lost and will never be known. For this reason the process of quotation from the past is both barbaric and redemptive: a sacrilegious illumination. Even quotation from the most recent past has to be seen as belonging to man's primitive history. In other words even if the

quotation is recent and belongs to a period of man's *civilised* history it still has to be regarded as primitive since it depends on a primitive instinct in man: snatching from what has been destroyed. Commodities, objects, can be seen as dialectical images only in terms of novelty that wears off, of the new rapidly becoming old. Commodities lose their use-value and survive as relics of some bygone age. In that sense they are *memento mori* and myth, according to Adorno.⁴⁴ Adorno defines myth as the essence of alienated objects that have been displaced from their original functions or meanings, as opposed to Benjamin's meaning of myth as a nostalgia for a primal (non-hierarchical) society.⁴⁵

In addition, just as the dream is a result of the dialectical image and can be dialecticised, ambiguity is the trace of the dialectical image – not as Benjamin states the dialectical image. Ambiguity is what the dialectical image exudes as idea, essence, memory, which need in turn to be dialecticised. 'Je voudrais juste ajouter que l'ambiguïté n'est pas la traduction de la dialectique en image, mais sa «trace», qui elle-même attend d'être dialectisée de bout en bout par la théorie.'⁴⁶

There are similarities and differences in Benjamin's and Adorno's thinking. The differences lie in each's approach towards history. Benjamin considers objects under a poetic light, Adorno is more critical. For Benjamin history unfolds through objects that have been produced as a result of dreaming the future. Access to historical moments such as the Baroque and the nineteenth century takes place through the objects (mainly creative and cultural) these produce. The analysis of such objects allows for a better understanding of history at a given moment including what came before it (albeit in fragments), and in predicting what comes after – since the past influences and paves the way for the future. Benjamin argues that the creation of the objects associated with each epoch stems from the desire for glory, a dream to redeem the past in the present and do better for future posterity. This desire is embedded in human

consciousness, in its psyche and is not a deliberately conscious act. In many ways Adorno agrees with Benjamin as to how historical understanding and its criticism can be achieved: through looking back, through the comparison of one epoch with another. This for Adorno also takes place via objects associated with given historical moments. Only for Adorno, these objects are not a result of dreaming, they are consciously constructed with specific aims in mind: glory, showing social reality, political criticism. Any dreams that lie within these objects representing dialectical images of progress and decline need to be extracted and in turn analysed to understand why such objects inspire dreams, why were they indeed created.

In the second part I explore the above ideas further and continue my discussion of Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas seen through *le corps-femme de la modernité* in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Dix, and Bellmer. I start with *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*'s figuration of the feminine concentrating on the figure of Olympia.

PART II: MODERNITY'S *CORPS-FEMME* & THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

Les Contes d'Hoffmann's Olympia, Benjamin's Allegory, Ruin and Redemption

While Marcuse would like to prepare for the transformation of demystified material conditions of life through the analytical destruction of an objective illusion [in bourgeois works of art] and in this way accomplish the *Aufhebung* of culture (in which these conditions are stabilized), Benjamin does not see his task in an attack on art, which is already understood as being in a stage of decomposition. His criticism of art relates to its objects conservatively, whether it is a question of baroque *Trauerspiel*, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal*, or

Soviet film of the early twenties. It aims, to be sure, at the 'mortification of the works'; however, criticism effects a mortification of the work of art only in order to transpose it from the medium of beauty to the medium of truth – and thereby to *redeem* it.⁴⁷

Habermas talks about the ideology-critique shared by Marcuse and Adorno involving 'an illusory truth claim' juxtaposed with what really lies behind it. This results in the release of 'an emancipatory potential' stemming from within illusion.⁴⁸ Habermas separates ideology-critique from Benjamin's 'redemptive critique' which bears a conservative relation to the object under scrutiny rather than a critical one. Benjamin exposes what is already taking place; he exposes the truth of history in decline through the object.⁴⁹ In other words, by resurrecting and preserving the shattered remnants of the past that exist in the new object, the eventual fate of all objects with time is revealed.

For Benjamin all objects represent a repetitive unfolding of history as progress and decline, of memory and its forgetting, of historical standstill and awakening, of catastrophe. They are dialectical images. Furthermore, their novelty always contains past-traces and therefore is an illusion. What Benjamin seeks to do through his analysis of a work is to redeem its truth content. This can take place only through the decomposition of the work's material-content that turns it into what Benjamin calls 'a ruin' allowing the real ideas behind the work to shine through; to be redeemed. This redemption can also be that of memory, of experience. In Buci-Glucksmann's words, 'c'est dire que face à la déperdition d'expérience vécue de la modernité, face à une véritable destitution du sujet, de sa maîtrise et de sa volonté, seule la «rédemption du souvenir» (*Rettung der Vergangenheit*) peut fonder une véritable expérience (*Erfahrung*).'⁵⁰

Before discussing two central issues that form an important part of Benjamin's thought; experience and the redemption of memory, I want to look at some of his ideas on allegory and ruin that lead to redemption by analysing a

fragment from *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* that represents *Trauerspiel* and *corps-femme de la modernité*, the doll-Olympia. Redemption in Benjamin's eyes necessitates ruin and fragmentation, and there Olympia's fragmentation is what redeems Hoffmann's (the hero's) senses, but is also used by Hoffmann (the author) to force society into a critical awareness of its conditions (for example, the abuse of technology).

Reading Hoffmann's Olympia (in *Der Sandmann*, 1817) with Benjamin's ideas of redemption and ruin in mind leads to several points. To begin with the name given to the *human* doll Olympia evokes the classical realm of Greek mythology and Olympic deities that represent humanity's golden age. This it evokes both as symbol and allegory. The name Olympia on its own at a linguistic level is symbolic. The name together with the automaton-being it represents becomes allegorical because of its ambiguity.

Classicism looked to 'the human' as the highest 'fullness of being', and since it could not but scorn allegory, it grasped in this yearning only an appearance of the symbolic. [...]. The 'difference between symbolic and allegorical representation' is explained as follows: 'The latter signifies merely a general concept, or an idea which is different from itself; the former is the very incarnation and embodiment of the idea. In the former a process of substitution takes place ... In the latter the concept itself has descended into our physical world, and we see it directly in the image.'⁵¹

Taken by itself the name 'Olympia' embodies the idea of this classical realm and describes a 'momentary totality'.⁵² This is the temporal mode associated with the symbol. Its relation to redemption has to be immediate since it takes place in the imagination; the name is equal to what it evokes mentally. However, the name Olympia is given to an automaton-object; it is a physical image. It is an allegory since it designates a being that is 'different from itself'; that is, Olympia-the doll is a mechanical creation pretending to perfection and beauty, yet has nothing to do with the realm of Olympic gods and myth or with a living creature. Her allegorical unfolding as an image-concept gradually

becomes shattered to reveal a different reality that takes place through 'progression in a series of moments'.⁵³ The difference in time-modes between the symbol's immediacy and the allegory's progression in time is the reason why 'it is allegory, and not the symbol, which embraces myth'.⁵⁴

If Olympia represents allegory through an unfolding of myth, as well as its destruction, then the unfolding of myth and the destruction of allegory correspond to the awakening Benjamin talks about in relation to myth. 'It is a question of the "dissolution" of myth into the space of history. That, of course, can happen only through the awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been.'⁵⁵ Olympia, because of her name, points to a semi-conscious remembering of history (but in name only). Olympia does not point to the full recovery of knowledge obtained from history. Myth and by extension the 'dissolution of myth' are considered by Benjamin as the objective character of self-alienated merchandise.⁵⁶ Olympia is self-alienated merchandise and fetish-object of desire embracing *Trauerspiel* (the tragic drama of humanity in modernity as reification and alienation) because she is allegory. Her naming points to myth while she also embodies modernity's 'dissolution of myth'.

Olympia the doll represents (and is) a dialectical image at a standstill. Olympia embodies the blockage of the course of history. That is, elements of ancient Greece, Baroque tragedy, are quoted in Olympia and come to a halt in the form of this *corps-femme de la modernité* of the nineteenth-century. The myth of the Olympic gods is narrated through ancient Greek statues. During the Baroque figurative sculpture attains maximum (frozen) movement. Classical myth and Baroque movement come together in the creation of Hoffmann's modern Olympia. Every image is an interruption and a continuation of history. (One female figure of Olympia's after-history is Bellmer's doll, whereas she represents that doll's prehistory.) Allegory embraces the homogeneous course of history, the ever-repetitive series of moments only to shatter it through death-disintegration indicating that earthly natural life for all its so-called progress is

bound to fall into ruins. Yet upon (and with) these ruins new life is built. Progress and decline come together. Redemption comes through the recognition that progress brings decline with it; that the ruins of the past exist in the present. In allegory redemption is constantly postponed because it is ambiguous. 'The meanings of allegorical images are by no means self-evident, for according to the historical-philosophical dynamic of the allegorical world view, all meaning has ceased to be self-evident. In this chaotic cosmos of desultory, miscellaneous fragments, the allegorist alone is sovereign.'⁵⁷ Olympia herself is ambiguous: she appears alive but is not.

Olympia's creation follows Benjamin's reasoning in *E.T.A. Hoffmann und Oskar Panizza* (1930, *E.T.A. Hoffmann und Oskar Panizza*) concerning timelessness and duration. There Benjamin points out that the history of any literary text has two parallel non-identical time-lines. One is the work's timelessness (*Ewigkeit*). Timelessness relates Hoffmann's literary work to the long history of fabulation and narration as genre fixing its continuity in the world of texts from the outside. According to Benjamin, the timelessness of Hoffmann's stories lies in their connection to Medieval fables and ancient tales of magic. Together with the latter Hoffmann's stories belong to a much older tradition that has religious origins of which ancient fables are none other than impoverished distortions. In *E.T.A. Hoffmann und Oskar Panizza* Benjamin adds that tales and fables are the most ancient form of human storytelling linking up with Homer, the epic, the fables of *1001 Nights*. In modernity the former preserve the medium of fabulation and the fantastic in spite of undergoing numerous modifications. The second time-line is the durability of the work in question, how long its vogue lasts. Durability is the time-interval of the work seen as a prominent showplace for the literary tendencies of its time, for its being part of a given literary movement. This stems from the work's inner structure and narrative devices that link it to a specific epoch. Hoffmann's writings relate to the movement in Germany defined as Romanticism. The

strangeness and singularity of Hoffmann's writings lie in his procedure of linking archaic powers with the actual and everyday for effect. Hoffmann uses actual social phenomena that represent progress and positivity (technology, love, art, music) and depicts them in decline (alienated from their original positive values) indicative of nineteenth-century life.⁵⁸ The female figures that Hoffmann depicts, especially, embody such qualities and become the fragments that reflect each novel as a whole. Olympia is one such figure. She has two time-lines and represents an inner *mise-en-abyme* for Hoffmann's novel and its time-lines. She is part of a continuing history of effigy-making that dates from time immemorial (in all cultures), while her own status as art object is of limited duration (and culture specific) – as long as the illusion that she is alive lasts. Her allegorical ambiguity lies between her definition as either an artistic creation or as a scientific invention.

In the theological sense Hoffmann's Olympia represents man's scientific progress that can only go so far before it falls apart. Man's real progress does not take place in the here and now, but with death and going to heaven; a literal redemption. Theologically speaking Olympia's disintegration expresses Benjamin's idea of history as decline; that is, the history of the profane world man lives in after the Fall from the Garden of Eden. Before the Fall name and thing were identical. 'All art [...] is concerned with man's relation to the absolute. Allegory signifies the necessarily fragmentary nature of that relation in a world that has itself been reduced to fragments or ruins.'⁵⁹ To the allegorist, Olympia becomes an artistic (literary) representation of man's relation to the absolute. This is a damaged alienated relation that looks to technology for life, not to the spiritual or the divine, and therefore desperately needs to wake up in order to be redeemed. 'In the field of allegorical intuition, the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished.'⁶⁰ By 'divine learning' Benjamin means Biblical knowledge and the recognition of

man's direct and unambiguous relation to the absolute before the Fall from grace, as well as the acknowledgement of man's incompleteness.

If the idea of redemption through death distinguishes the allegorical path to salvation characteristic of *Trauerspiel*, it provides [...] the basis of Benjamin's own critical methodology, which echoes clearly in his claim that 'criticism means the mortification of works.' For the goal of criticism is through the 'mortification' of transitory, historical, material content of works of art, to permit them to bask in the eternal light of truth, and thereby pave the way for their redemption.⁶¹

The 'mortification' in *Der Sandmann* as artwork takes place through Olympia: she is the key image-fragment that emerges from and does away with the work's totality as well as representing history as its interruption, as catastrophe.

In *Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen* (1916, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*) Benjamin quotes from the Bible: "As man should name all kinds of living creatures, so should they be called".⁶² He further emphasizes the Biblical importance of man's capacity to name:

The linguistic being of things is their language; this proposition applied to man, means: the linguistic being of man is his language. Which signifies: man communicates his own mental being *in* his language. However the language of man speaks in words. Man therefore communicates his own mental being [...] by *naming* all other things [...] *It is therefore the linguistic being of man to name things. [...] in naming the mental being of man communicates itself to God.*⁶³

Benjamin explains that man is made up of mental being and linguistic being. Mental being is immaterial; it is spirit that takes form through linguistic being. Linguistic being communicates through the material of language. Using language man exercises his linguistic being dictated by his mental being. In this sense mental communication is not 'through' language but '*in*' it. Language is God-given, words are already there, man chooses from them to communicate his

ideas (mental being) in language not to communicate language. Through this mental communication that takes place by the exercising of linguistic being in language man expresses himself to God, and this makes him the master of nature and things. By contrast images are profane since they are man-made imitations that cannot compete with the sacred. Benjamin cites from Genesis I: ““Let there be - He made(created) - He named””⁶⁴ Olympia is created in human form, given artificial life and named, which represents a sacrilege since the sacred God-given capacity of man to name has been profaned into his need to imitate the Creator and create. This new creator is using science to compete with religion. Olympia not only imitates human form, she moves and even more important she has a voice: she speaks and sings.

The highest mental region of religion is (in the concept of revelation) at the same time the only one that does not know the inexpressible. For it is addressed in name and expresses itself in revelation. In this, however, notice is given that only the highest mental being, as it appears in religion, rests solely on man and on language in him, whereas all art, not excluding poetry, does not rest on the ultimate essence of language-mind, but on language-mind confined to things, even if in consummate beauty. [...]. Language itself is not perfectly expressed in things themselves. This proposition has a double meaning in its metaphorical and literal senses: the languages of things are imperfect, and they are dumb. Things are denied the pure formal principle of language – sound. They can only communicate to one another through a more or less material community. This community is immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication; it is magical (for there is also a magic of matter). The incomparable feature of human language is that its magical community with things is immaterial and purely mental, and the symbol of this is sound. The Bible expresses this symbolic fact when it says that God breathes his breath into man: this is at once life and mind and language.⁶⁵

In other words, naming represents knowledge; knowing the name of ideas, concepts, things that are already there. Creating objects, inventions, things, and naming them becomes an extension of the divine in man. Only here things created and named by man cannot in return create, name, or communicate in

sound by themselves. The sentence 'is addressed in name and expresses itself as revelation' can be used to describe Olympia's situation. What is revealed there as truth is the very falsehood of Olympia's being. She is a thing but she speaks and sings, she possesses sound. Yet this sound is used to deceive, to give the illusion that she is human and can communicate, whereas in reality she is dumb and cannot communicate herself to God or to another human being. Her communication is through her thingness or 'material community' as a beautiful doll, not through language. Again the sacred has been turned into the profane.

The theme of the sacred turning into the profane is central to Benjamin's thought and his idea of redemption. Only if the sacred is mixed with the profane can there be any redemption. Hence the fragmentation of Olympia and her turning into a ruin represents a twofold redemption. One – important to Benjamin's literary criticism and role of allegorist – would have to do with the name Olympia and her representation of classicism that falls apart and needs to be redeemed from its ruins as a prehistory, as the archaic contained within the modern. As the past that returns in the present and needs to be redeemed from this present and recognised as what the present owes its past. An aspect of this is what modern German literature owes to the Greek Classics. The second form of redemption would have to do with Benjamin's theological thinking which is expressed in this early essay and finds its way into many of his later writings. This is to do with Olympia as name-creature, her ruin reveals the shortcomings and arrogance of science compared with God's creation. The idea to be redeemed from the ruin of Olympia is that man irrespective of any technological advances can never compete with Almighty God, and must recognise his human limitations – at least from a reading of this early essay.

Adorno's ideology-critique gives importance to the fragment like Benjamin. Unlike in Benjamin, this is not for redemptive purposes but to show modern society for what it actually is: in a state of dissolution, non-identity, negative progress. In Adorno's words, 'the fragment is that part of the totality of the

work that opposes totality.’⁶⁶ Fragment, usually, means a scene from a narrative, a motif, an element in an artwork, that is isolated in order to analyse the work in its totality through this fragment. Olympia is one such fragment in *Der Sandmann*. Adorno responds to Benjamin’s dissolution of myth in history: ‘il me semble que le centre de l’œuvre d’art autonome n’appartient pas lui-même au côté mythique [...] mais qu’il est en soi dialectique: qu’il croise en lui l’élément magique avec le signe de la liberté.’⁶⁷ The work of art for Adorno is purely dialectical. It is both enchanted spell and freedom of creative thought. The scene of Olympia (name-mechanical doll)’s fragmentation signals at least two things: the end of an era and technological progress as destruction portrayed via the enchantment that is the artwork. The end of an era follows from the idea Hegel’s aesthetic theory puts forward: ‘the idea of the end of art where art is understood to be what Hegel meant by classicism, the perfect interpenetration of form and content’.⁶⁸

Hoffmann’s work illustrates the beginnings of the seeds of negativity that were taking form in nineteenth-century aesthetic works. ‘Perfect interpenetration of form and content’ is no longer possible as is seen from Olympia. She represents the alienated human condition that was taking place in the early 1800s with the Napoleonic occupation of Hoffmann’s Prussia (1806-15). A condition that becomes pronounced in the twentieth-century, especially with the First World War and well into Hitler’s Third Reich and the Second World War. Man’s vision of the world, his relation to the absolute has become an increasingly shaky one. Whether the critic looks at the work within the context of Hoffmann’s time or from a later perspective – Olympia’s disintegration (the fragmentation of the fragment in the work) – signals the halt of harmony and completion in the artwork, and expresses a new aesthetic that seeks to oppose the unity of form and content, and tends towards dissonance.

Before modernity the unity of form and content was defined as high art. With modernity and after, dissonance becomes the expression of artworks: ‘dis-

sonance is the truth about harmony'.⁶⁹ In fact Adorno goes further with this phrase, he sees dissonance as an eloquent form of expression in art, as well as what holds the artwork together. 'Although art revolts about its neutralization as an object of contemplation, insisting on the most extreme incoherence and dissonance, these elements are those of unity; without this unity they would not even be dissonant.'⁷⁰ Olympia embodies the beginning of dissonance through the unification of myth, art, science, that are represented in her, yet cannot survive together for long. This becomes the moral-expression the work of art (Hoffmann's novel) wants to convey. Dissonance in Olympia causes her fragmentation which is representative of the society that the work depicts.

Dissonance becomes current language in twentieth-century artworks. Which is one reason for Olympia's modernity. There is also the technological aspect: the scientific invention that the narrative depends on. Scientific invention under the guise of progress suddenly becomes the very menace that not only alienates man, but destroys him as well. Science and technology are not only used for benign purposes, but for creating advanced warfare and weapons of mass destruction. Through Adorno's ideology-critique Olympia's fate can be read as disguised criticism on Hoffmann's part, levelled at a society through a work of art in order to expose a sinister reality and galvanise society's thinking into some action. The attempt at some redemption using Hoffmann's work takes place through a critical remembering of the work's context. This becomes useful for bringing about knowledge and awareness of the consequences of society's past actions, its condition, the myth of progress, rather than for attaining any actual redemption.

In the next section I continue the discussion of feminine-figuration through Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire. I look at Benjamin's theory of 'correspondances' in relation to Baudelaire, and related ideas such as memory, experience in the three essays: *Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire* (1938, *Le Paris du second Empire chez Baudelaire*), *Über einige Motive bei*

Baudelaire (1939, *Sur quelques thèmes Baudelairiens*), *Zentralpark* (1940, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*) grouped under the title *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. Such ideas along with redemption, allegory and ruins, *corps-femmes de la modernité*, will form a basis for some interpretations of the artworks that will follow in this chapter, as well as provide a contrast to Adorno's ideas which I also explore.

Traces between Benjamin and Adorno

As Habermas has noted, Benjamin was usually less concerned with bursting the ideological illusions of the cultural sphere than with redeeming those utopian moments of tradition which are incessantly endangered by the oblivion of forgetting. Whereas 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire' in many respects comes closest to the method of ideology-critique valued by his friend Adorno, at the same time Benjamin's lifelong preoccupation with discovering possible traces of reconciled life occupies a prominent place in the concluding pages of the essay. In his view, all knowledge which fails to concern itself with the question of redemption remains partial and inferior.⁷¹

Several important issues emerge from Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire – issues that occupy Benjamin's thought and recur in many of his writings. These issues include redemption, memory, oblivion, the past, how past-remembrance translates into the reawakening of experience, the manifestation of the old in the new, as well the issues of the modern city, and '*le corps-femme de la modernité*'. Redemption of the old from the new, and of past experiences (that also lead to an understanding of the modern city through the changing representation of the female figure) require the search for traces of the past, of tradition, of history, of what man has not come to terms with (including childhood), that exist in the very fabric of the everyday present. Before

discussing memory and experience in *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*, it is useful to look at the site of their unfolding known as traces and at how traces are defined by Benjamin and Adorno.

Benjamin's phrase 'habiter signifie laisser des traces,'⁷² stresses the fact that we live surrounded by an accumulation of traces left by predecessors, companions, ourselves, objects, in the number of places that we inhabit and can return to haunt us. These traces are not only left on the outside but can also persist inside one's mind in the form of forgotten memory that goes back to childhood on a personal level, and to a collective primordial history (*Urgeschichte*). These can suddenly erupt through remembrance, dreams, sudden encounters. Traces often undergo transformations or modifications, thus evoking absent-presence, and can in certain cases be so overpowering giving a sense of *déjà-vu*, shock, or strange familiarity (uncanny to use Freud's term) that they need to be extracted from other more recent traces, or from the present and reconstructed as a form of redemption.

As I mentioned earlier redemption's main relevance to Adorno lies in its providing a driving force in the quest for truth and knowledge. Investigating and reconstructing traces are important in this quest. In this respect Benjamin and Adorno are in agreement except for a difference in each one's definition of traces. For Benjamin traces are shadows of the past (they represent the past) that exists in the present: they are becoming and disappearance. Together with the present, past-traces form a dialectical image which is ambiguous (or allegorical) since every element belonging to this image (of any given epoch) points to something other than itself (of a past epoch). (As in for example *Correspondances*, Baudelaire's poem and the term Benjamin uses to express this ambiguity, which I will turn to shortly.) Benjamin's trace provides one pole of the ambiguity that is the dialectical image.

For Adorno, ambiguity is not the dialectical image but its trace; that is, ambiguity and trace are one and the same. Whereas for Benjamin ambiguity and

dialectical image are one and the same with past traces contributing to the ambiguity that is the dialectical image. In Adorno's words: 'Je voudrais juste ajouter que l'ambiguïté n'est pas la traduction de la dialectique en image mais sa «trace», qui elle-même attend d'être dialectisée de bout en bout par la théorie.'⁷³

According to Adorno, instead of the trace being part of dialectical-image-ambiguity it becomes the dialectical image's other, the fragment-memory that persists when the image is no longer there. To Adorno, traces represent the essence or ideas given off by dialectical image. Traces are the ambiguity which needs to be analysed dialectically. Traces also represent absent-presence for Adorno, only they do not lie within the image as a representation of a lingering past; they are what remains of the image after this disappears.

For example, Bellmer's doll bears the traces of Olympia, of childhood, among other past origins. Bellmer's doll via Benjamin's ideas on ambiguity and traces reads as the doll is a dialectical image, it is allegorical and ambiguous because of past traces. It is ambiguous because it contains the old and the new (like Olympia it continues the timeless effigy tradition). In the doll lie traces of antique statues now transformed into modern sculpture, the eroticism of Venus that has now become appropriated by a perverse female doll. It is also ambiguous because its original meaning has become displaced into a new meaning. Bellmer's doll is originally based upon a child's plaything that has undergone a metamorphosis and become aesthetic object-sculpture or erotic-fetish object. Elements of the past continue their existence under a new form in any work of art. Through Adorno's reasoning the doll is a dialectical image that expresses something – for example childhood or the feminine other – in a certain way. Childhood or the feminine other as objects of the work need to be juxtaposed against an underlying truth that comes out of how these are constructed there, and why; how these are expressed or portrayed there, and why. This *what* (object of the work), *how* (it is constructed there) and the reasons for both taken together form the trace: the ambiguity which is also the

effect given off by the work – its spirit. Bellmer's dolls portray a deformed or destroyed childhood, or an erotically perverse feminine other. An analysis and criticism of the ideas given by what the object represents provides information about the work, the message it wants to communicate. In Bellmer's doll for instance deformed childhood or perverse femininity can be taken as political, sociological, or aesthetic comments on a given epoch that would need to be analysed critically following Adorno's methodology.

Both philosophers complement each other's thinking, one can take the trace either in Benjamin's terms or in Adorno's; looking at both definitions of traces gives a more complete analysis where artworks are concerned that lead to more meanings. Benjamin's traces are about redemption of past quotations appropriated within an object that express the unfolding of history: its progress and decline (from its original value, purpose, form) via this object, that come to a halt in the object. Adorno's traces are about what the object expresses. This needs critical analysis to understand a social reality – as it was or is at a particular moment. For Adorno artworks, objects are always in the past, they have happened. Their traces are the ideas they communicate which are also past, in decline. However, these objects, their idea-traces that are in decline are looked at from a later context, from a present perspective. This is the reason why in Adorno's view traces given off by objects are by definition an ambiguity. They are the past seen from the present, as present.

Next I turn to Benjamin's ideas of traces as the past in the present in Baudelairian correspondences from which memory, remembrance, experience unfold. The main reason for looking at Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire is the recurring depiction of *le corps femme de la modernité* there, as well as the analysis of different types of memory and experience. I will then relate these ideas to *le corps-femme de la modernité* in Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Dix, and Bellmer.

Baudelaire and Hoffmann: *Correspondances* and Memory, Integrated and Sudden Experience

Benjamin's thinking is based on the idea of a redemption of the past from the present and on the recognition of the past as tradition. According to Benjamin, the present can become the past's origin: the point from which one looks back and remembers. In Baudelaire, Benjamin finds an abundance of present-past images. Benjamin's essays on Baudelaire illustrate this fascination with Baudelaire's imagery, with Baudelaire's Paris as the city of modern life, and the extent to which Benjamin finds the poet's writings thought provoking, particularly the idea of 'correspondances'. Benjamin takes the term from Baudelaire's poem *Correspondances* and discusses this in *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* (1939, *Sur quelques thèmes baudelairiens*):

Laissant de côté toute la littérature érudite sur les «correspondances» (idée commune à tous les mystiques, et que Baudelaire avait rencontrée chez Fourier), Proust ne s'arrête pas non plus aux variations critiques sur cette réalité de fait fournies par les synesthésies. L'essentiel est que les correspondances contiennent une conception de l'expérience qui fait place à des éléments culturels. Il fallut que Baudelaire s'appropriât ces éléments pour pouvoir pleinement mesurer ce que signifie en réalité la catastrophe dont il était lui-même, en tant qu'homme moderne, le témoin. [...]. Pour définir ce que Baudelaire entend par «correspondances», on pourrait parler d'une expérience qui tente de s'établir sans crises. Elle n'est possible que dans le domaine culturel. Si elle en sort, elle se présente alors comme «le beau». Dans le beau, la valeur de culte se manifeste comme valeur d'art. Les «correspondances» sont les données de la remémoration. Non les données de l'histoire, mais celles de la préhistoire.⁷⁴

Benjamin agrees with Proust as to Baudelaire view's on time where only certain days counted, whereas others melted into oblivion. These days belong to the category of time 'qui achève'; that is, they represent an upper limit for

memory or an ending of time for a memory.⁷⁵ (That is, remembering of the past ends with the present or begins from the present.) Baudelaire fixed the contents of these days or intervals as ‘correspondances’.⁷⁶ ‘Correspondances’ become a space for feelings that one experiences and can be aroused by almost anything. Although they can be of the utmost intensity, these feelings or emotions are not real. They do not come out of actually living an experience but from something sensed, or through the remembering of a lived experience. For this reason ‘correspondances’ exist mainly within a cultural realm (including nature), and find their expression through the beautiful which most often turns into the aesthetic; works of art which include the narration of memory and halt time at a particular moment.

The remembrance associated with Baudelaire’s ‘correspondances’ is that of a primordial, archaic past where for instance nature was both animate and inanimate and man could communicate with it:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles:
 L’homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l’observent avec des regards familiers.⁷⁷

According to Benjamin, Baudelaire’s poem exudes a sense of longing, a sigh for a primordial past. (At the same time Baudelaire wanted to be seen as a modern poet; that is, progressive. Yet Baudelaire’s nostalgia for an archaic past is contradictory. It forms a dialectic image with Baudelaire’s thirst for modernity – typical of modernity.) Baudelaire’s images bear no chronology, are atemporal and fragmentary. Taking up Baudelaire’s term ‘correspondances’, Benjamin intends to introduce feelings of melancholy and nostalgia caused by what is past, by what is no more into the now-present (*Jetztzeit*); to create a sense of shock, to induce an awakening.

One interpretation of Baudelaire’s lines is that nature can be seen as a sacred

temple providing dynamic objects of worship such as trees, wind, rain, stones. (Stonehenge is one example – among certain cults such nature worship is still practised.) There figures and images can be carved on wood, stone, as a form of (profane) communication (based on linguistic being with sacred intent through mental being). The sound of whistling winds, gushing rivers are a form of language even if unintelligible. This sacred past is now viewed as profane, yet it remains somewhere deeply embedded in man's psyche. It retains a power that can suddenly come forth on modern man's confrontation with an archaic object or image.

In studying Simmel's presentation of Goethe's concept of truth, I came to see very clearly that my concept of origin in the *Trauerspiel* book is a rigorous and decisive transposition of this basic Goethean concept from the domain of nature to that of history. Origin – it is, in effect, the concept of *Ur*-phenomenon extracted from the pagan context of nature and brought into the Jewish contexts of history. Now in my work on the arcades I am equally concerned with fathoming an origin. To be specific, I pursue the origin of the forms and mutations of the Paris arcades from their beginning to their decline, and I locate this origin in the economic facts. [...] these facts would not be primal phenomena; they become such insofar as in their own individual development [...] they give rise to the whole series of the arcade's concrete historical forms [...].⁷⁸

This passage from *Das Passagen-Werk* is striking because of the correspondence between Benjamin's idea of 'the pagan contexts of nature brought into Jewish contexts of history' with Baudelaire's lines on nature corresponding to (or being) a temple with animate pillars – an image that fascinates Benjamin.⁷⁹ Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* is full of 'correspondances'. There architecture, among other objects, comes to life with past memories and experiences. In his poem, Baudelaire likens nature to architecture; to a temple (of life, of faith, of history). There man passes through a known, yet unexplored, unpredictable space rich with meanings that need to be deciphered in order to become accessible, or remembered as a not so long ago

state of man. In architecture such as Paris's arcades Benjamin sees history unfold and come to a standstill. There also history proceeds as progress and ends in decline. This Benjamin links to the material conditions of the city. Benjamin has gone from the profane, 'pagan', to the sacred 'Jewish contexts', and back to the profane, the 'Paris arcades'.

In modern cities such as Baudelaire's Paris (and Benjamin's Berlin, I return to this in Bellmer and Dix) machines and their products are in high demand and with this there is an increasing devaluation of human creativity, and a casting aside of spirituality. Works of art are valued for market-profits not for the inspiration nor the beauty they contain. Man turns his back on nature and the sacred, and towards materialism and the profane. Human conditions such as alienation, indifference, anonymity, reign. The escape into the recesses of the imagination and the recreation of an archaic idyll become a source of salvation from the catastrophe of facing everyday life.

'The *correspondances* are the key to Baudelaire's use of allegory: from the ruins of modern life he is able miraculously to conjure forth the image of a collective past that has long since faded from memory.'⁸⁰ This is what fascinates and strikes a chord with Benjamin. 'Correspondances' contain the notion of a non-experienced, estranged past that persists as part of an individual's memory. This estranged past finds its most apt expression in art and man's objects. There past-traces linger on and can suddenly come alive in the most banal objects causing a rupture-rapture in one's perception as a *sauvetage* (escape or salvation) from the everyday. 'À travers celles qu'a décrites Baudelaire [correspondances], c'est le passé qui murmure, et leur expérience canonique a elle-même sa place dans une vie antérieure.'⁸¹ Benjamin is underlining the role played by the past and results in the formation and definition of experience. The answer to the question whether the traces are of a prehistory when thinking the modern, according to Benjamin, or are the thought, memory, effect, that one is left with after experiencing the image that need to be analysed dialectically,

according to Adorno, must be both. In fact Benjamin comes close to Adorno's ideology-critique in that he distils from such images feelings and ideas that he then concentrates on as criticism of a social reality. However, these feelings in Benjamin result from what he calls: 'mémoire involuntaire' (Proust's term), integrated and sudden experience, which I now discuss in relation to *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann is about poetry, remembrance, and loss of love. There love takes place through chance encounters, its loss is represented by the destructive chance encounter and is celebrated as the suffering that serves poetic genius. In the prologue the poet Hoffmann joins fellow students in a tavern and starts telling them a tale while thinking of his latest love, the opera-singer Stella.

The students accuse Hoffmann of being in love, but he denies it. Just then he spots Lindorf, his hated rival. They exchange insults, and Hoffmann declares that he has never encountered Lindorf without suffering some ill-consequence – even in his love affairs. In an aside, he confesses his love for Stella, whom he sees as the amalgam of three previous lovers – artist, young girl and courtesan – he then offers to relate the story of these affairs.⁸²

Hoffmann then starts to narrate memories of his love-misadventures in the acts that follow. In the opera's epilogue Hoffmann finishes his love memories just as Stella finishes her operatic performance nearby. His friend:

Nicklausse explains to everyone that Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta are but three aspects of Stella. [...]. Furious Hoffmann smashes his glass [...] flings it in despair at his broken life. [...]. Stella [...] moves towards Hoffmann, but stops. He sees in her nothing but his tormentors Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta. Lindorf offers Stella his arm. [...] the crowd departs [...] the stage darkens. The Muse appears before Hoffmann [...] and tells him to rekindle the fire of his genius. [...]. A final chorus points the moral that one is enriched even more by sorrow than by love.⁸³

There are several points in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* that find parallels with

Benjamin's ideas on memory and experience in *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire*. First Hoffmann's two encounters with Stella and Lindorf trigger off 'mémoire involuntaire' and then 'voluntaire' leading to his narration of experiences that comprise 'correspondances' and 'expérience vécue' (Proust's term). 'Expérience vécue' describes feelings, one can suddenly have on encountering someone or something, similar or identical to feelings inspired due to a previously lived experience; that is, the encounter maybe new, the feelings it evokes are not. Stella involuntarily reminds (mémoire involuntaire) Hoffmann of his three loves, and this places him in a situation of voluntary remembering (mémoire volontaire) by narrating his memories. Correspondences between former female lovers are found in Stella. For this reason Hoffmann falls in love with her at first sight. Lindorf involuntarily reminds Hoffmann of actual bad experiences happening whenever he appears. Hoffmann has lived these bad experiences with Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta. Olympia turns out to be an automaton, Antonia dies after singing, whereas Giulietta leaves him for Lindorf, at the same time Hoffmann loses his mirror-reflection and a murder is committed. Olympia belongs mainly to 'correspondances' and not to love as an 'expérience vécue', since the feelings she inspires exist on the level of the contemplative-gaze and Hoffmann's elevated sensitivity. This makes him dream and clouds his judgement of reality. Olympia is an allegory; that is, she differs from what she is. 'Une chose que l'intention allégorique vient frapper se trouve séparée des corrélations ordinaires de la vie: elle est à la fois brisée et conservée. L'allégorie s'attache aux ruines. Elle offre l'image de l'agitation figée.'⁸⁴ If Olympia inspires powerful feelings and illusions she also shatters them. She is 'dialectics at a standstill': 'elle offre l'image de l'agitation figée'. In other words as allegory, Olympia incorporates a dynamic of contradiction within a fixed image.

Analysing Baudelaire's creativity, Benjamin explains that it is based on a tense relation between two extremes: sharp sensitivity and concentrated

observation. 'Ce rapport se retrouve, sur le plan de la théorie entre la doctrine des correspondances et la doctrine de l'allégorie.'⁸⁵ Allegory shows itself as one thing whereas in reality it is another. 'Correspondances' contain a temporal duality; a present that includes a past, and a past that raises its head in the present. This relation exists in the case of Hoffmann towards Olympia, but also towards Stella. Stella herself is *ruin* because she is seen as fragmented into three. She is loved because of this whereas in reality she is neither Olympia, nor Antonia, nor Giulietta. In all of this Hoffmann chooses loves that can never be, end tragically, or destroy him.

Les théories détaillées avec lesquelles l'art pour l'art fut pensé non seulement par ses défenseurs de jadis mais aussi et surtout par l'histoire littéraire [...] aboutissent finalement à cette simple phrase: la sensibilité est le vrai sujet de la poésie. La sensibilité est toujours souffrante. Comme elle trouve sa concrétation suprême et sa plus riche détermination dans l'érotisme, elle trouve son parfait achèvement, qui coïncide avec sa transformation, dans la passion.⁸⁶

In the above Benjamin refers to poetic passion in an analysis of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, and this is also the moral purpose of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. The work is about erotic love that is inspired by art and the illusion (of beauty) in the outside world – singers, (mechanical) dancer, courtesan – and ends in art coming from inside Hoffmann – suffering that leads to the ignition of poetic genius. The main reason for this is that both Baudelaire and Hoffmann (the actual author reflected in his name-sake character in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*) are aware of the changing world about them, of the transformation of experience, of the loss of tradition, that are consequences of modernity and industrialisation voiced in their writings. Their writings bear a sense of mourning and the strong taste of ruin. These elements fascinate Benjamin leading to his search for motifs in their works that become the *mise-en-abyme* for the works themselves, such as music, demons, *corps-femme*, modern cities.

The Hoffmann, in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, prone to these sudden erotic passions for the impossible finds an echo in Benjamin's words on Baudelaire's *À une passante*. There the poet seated in a café-bar catches sight of a lady passer-by. From her stance and attire he discerns a sensuality and femininity that inspire erotic feelings in him, and which he describes in verse. Benjamin comments:

Sous son voile de veuve, rendue plus mystérieuse par le mouvement même qui, sans mot dire, l'entraîne dans la cohue, une inconnue croise le regard du poète; bien loin que, pour cette apparition, qui fascine l'habitant de la grande ville, la foule ne soit qu'un antagoniste, un élément adverse, c'est elle, au contraire, qui la présente au poète. Le ravissement du citadin est moins l'amour du premier regard que celui du dernier. C'est un adieu à tout jamais, qui coïncide dans le poème avec l'instant de l'ensorcellement. Le sonnet nous présente l'image du choc, que dis-je? celle de la catastrophe. Et cependant, par le saisissement même qu'elle provoque chez lui, elle a touché le poète en ce qu'il a de plus intime.⁸⁷

The moment of *ensorcellement* Benjamin describes is similar to the one experienced by the poet Hoffmann in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. There Hoffmann's love-affairs contain what Benjamin (and others, The Frankfurt School Philosophers) call *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*. Proust's 'expérience vécue' can be either. Both *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* exist in Baudelairean 'correspondances' of the past in the present. However, they are different. *Erfahrung* is integrated experience that takes place over time and is defined by the Frankfurt School as tightly bound to tradition.

Thus the end of 'auratic' art in the era of mass reproduction meant not merely the loss of the artistic *correspondances*, but also the end of *Erfahrung* (experience rooted in tradition). It was this aspect of cultural crisis of modern society with which Benjamin's colleagues [Adorno, for one] at the Institute [The Institute of Social Research] were in agreement. They also tended to accept the conclusion he drew from the loss of aura: 'The instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to the

artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.’⁸⁸

Both poets, Baudelaire (in reality) and Hoffmann (both in reality and in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*) are dealing with precisely this loss of ‘artistic *correspondances*’ that comes with the end of tradition and the beginning of the bustle of modern city life, with its mass produced commodities seen through *le corps-femme de la modernité* as dramatic tragedy, *Trauerspiel*.

There is a sigh of nostalgia coupled with social commentary in Benjamin’s phrases on Baudelaire’s poem: ‘le ravissement du citadin est moins l’amour du premier regard que celui du dernier. C’est un adieu à tout jamais’. Baudelaire uses a passing female figure to depict an ambiguous feeling comprising *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* embodied by the feminine: *le corps-femme de la modernité*. For Benjamin ‘the ideal of the shock-engendered experience *Erlebnis* is the catastrophe.’⁸⁹ *Erlebnis* is the ‘isolated experience’⁹⁰ that overcomes one all of a sudden on the surface. Baudelaire’s feelings for *la passante* constitute an erotic shock, which in reality is due to the sudden realisation that things are changing irreversibly. This female figure signals the end of an era where tradition is dying and art is economy-based. Consequently there is a loss of aura and authenticity in everything. *Erfahrung* or the sense of tradition are lost because there is no time, the pace of city-life has changed. Everything has become rapid both in its pace and its ‘durée’. *Erfahrung* stems from the poet’s knowledge and real memories of intimacy with the feminine. (These need not be of a sexual nature they can also come from the experience of maternal tenderness, or from some more remote archaic memory belonging to tradition). *Erfahrung* represents an experience integrated into the psyche over time. Without these neither the fictive Hoffmann (based on the real Hoffmann) nor Baudelaire would be able to feel a fleeting female-image with such intensity. Only as soon as he feels this he has to let go, *she* after all is *une passante*, passing by and passing away; that is, a flash

experience, an *Erlebnis*.

Baudelaire's fleeting image belongs to the modern, to café-life in the big city with its crowds and *flâneurs*. In Hoffmann's case his female-loves also represent a new era, in spite of their 'age-old professions' – singers, dancers, courtesans – because of the contexts within which they are projected. Both Benjamin and Adorno 'saw an erosion of true experience (*Erfahrungen*) as characteristic of modern life'.⁹¹ Modern life with its increasingly fast pace, its innovations, its multiplicity, its manifold sensations, its latest products, is the cause for the degradation of tradition, for the impoverishment of human communication. With modern life integrated experience becomes atomised into what is fleeting. This is synonymous for Adorno with dissonance in music, and for Benjamin with dissociated information instead of coherent narrative.⁹³ All three female figures: Olympia, Antonia, and Giuletta can be taken as fragments that represent each act's (tale's) totality. Each one of these *corps-femme de la modernité* embodies allegory, as well as 'dialectics at a standstill', and also *Erfahrung*'s erosion and its transformation into *Erlebnis*. This is not only an emotional experience but a critical statement on the modern society their respective tales are portraying: an increasingly scientifically-oriented society abandoning spirituality, preferring outward appearances to inner-life (as in Olympia). A modern society seeking quick thrills, pleasures and entertainment that are easily recycled based on economic-values of expediture and profit (as in Giuletta). In modern society the rise to fame and stardom is worth any cost and sacrifice (as in Antonia).

Memory, and types of experience such as *Erfahrung*, *Erlebnis*, 'expérience vécue' – through Benjamin's and Adorno's views on these – provide important insights in the analysis of artworks and their contexts through these. All forms of art throughout time depend in some way or other on these above-mentioned criteria. In addition these occupy a large part of Benjamin's and Adorno's analyses on works of art, each thinker stressing how changes in types of

experience constitute changing attitudes and methods of production in artworks over time especially with the advent of modernity and the avant-garde.

In Benjamin's words:

The authenticity of a thing [...] is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. [...]. The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition.⁹³

The authenticity of an object is linked to tradition through a longevity of its duration. 'Tradition referred to the type of integrated experience the Institute members called *Erfahrung*, which was being destroyed by so-called "progress".'⁹⁴ 'Progress' means advances in technology, industry, machines, that increases the pace of events and multiplies them. Consequently this shortens the *durée* of any experience and precipitates its dissolution in memory. At the same time, that flash experience is quickly replaced with another, equally swift. There is no time for any experience to become ingrained, felt, remembered, and thought about with any degree of depth. In Benjamin's words, 'l'absence d'illusions et le declin de l'aura sont des phénomènes identiques.'⁹⁵

In the next section I continue my discussion of the types of experience and the development of history through *le corps-femme de la modernité* in works by Bellmer – using Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas. I shall also look at a couple of Dix's images of femininity in modern city life as a bridge between Hoffmann, and Bellmer, as well as a contrast to Bellmer's figurations of the feminine.

Corps-femmes de la modernité: Hoffmann, Dix, and Bellmer

In 1932 Bellmer attends *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. It is known that the scene of Olympia's fragmentation influenced Bellmer's doll. 'This opera' is 'always

acknowledged in the literature' on Bellmer 'as a source for the doll', as Sue Taylor notes.⁹⁶ This influence has always – to the best of my knowledge – been explained in psychological terms and through speculation as to what Bellmer might have felt during the performance. My concern here is not with psychological interpretations, but with finding connections and correspondences in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with later works: Dix's female-figures, Bellmer's doll; correspondences that reflect Benjamin's ideas on past-traces, Baudelairean correspondences, modern city-life and depict the feminine as a *Trauerspiel du corps-femme de la modernité*. My other reason for using this opera as a starting point for my discussion is that it is – as Adorno says in *Hoffmanns Erzählungen in Offenbachs Motiven* (1932) – a work with a modern subject because it depicts aspects of alienation and the reification that take place within an age of increasing technological prowess and mechanisation.⁹⁷ These negative aspects are reflected in the shifting position of the feminine as image within modern society.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann opens up a world where everything is disconnected, fragmented, and the sense of impending doom does not seem very far away. It contains a rich combination of elements. Those relevant to my discussion are hedonism, alienation, loss of subjectivity, the dangers of technological progress, the old in the new, all expressed via female-figures. There the female figures represent, what Adorno calls, 'la construction dialectique de la relation du mythe à l'histoire'.⁹⁸ The dialectical auto-dissolution of myth taking place through the desacralisation of art is reflected in all females.⁹⁹ Their fates are bound to their duality as alienated love-objects and reified humans representative of the tragedy that is the *corps-femme de la modernité*. There exists in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* a deliberate destruction of beauty and art, an impossibility to communicate, soullessness, the futility of feelings. Adorno also describes Offenbach's music as a dialectical image of Arcadia and Hades: 'c'est précisément une interprétation d'Offenbach qui pourrait montrer clairement ce double sens: celui du monde infernal et d'Arcadie – deux catégories explicites

d'Offenbach, que l'on peut suivre jusque dans les détails de l'instrumentation'.¹⁰⁰ If Offenbach's music is indicative of the changing future face of musical creativity – reflecting modern intellect – *Les Contes d'Hoffmann's* stories contain the seeds of what becomes the subject-matter in Dix's work and is taken up by Bellmer.

This human alienation and loss of subjectivity in modern industrial cities is eloquently expressed in Benjamin's words:

Warmth is ebbing from things. The objects of daily use gently but insistently repel us. Day by day, in overcoming the sum secret resistences – not only the overt ones – that they put in our way, we have an immense labour to perform. We must compensate for their coldness with our warmth if they are not to freeze us to death, and handle their spines with infinite dexterity, if we are not to perish by bleeding. From our fellow men we should expect no succour. [...] officials, workmen, salesmen – they all feel themselves to be representatives of a refractory matter whose menace they take pains to demonstrate through their own surliness. And in the degeneration of things, with which, emulating human decay, they punish humanity, the country itself conspires. It gnaws at us like the things, and the German spring that never comes is only one of countless related phenomena of decomposing German nature. Here one lives as if the weight of the column of air supported by everyone had suddenly, against all laws, become in these regions perceptible.¹⁰¹

Benjamin's words spell out the disenchantment that has taken possession of those subjects whose very humanity is being threatened from within and without. Humans are treated as things, things are given importance over humans, feelings are destroyed, oppression reigns, hope is forever postponed. Benjamin's ideas about 'decomposing German nature', 'human decay', thing-degeneration find a perfect space in the interchangeable figures of doll and prostitute. These figures are fine examples of the *Trauerspiel* as *corps-femme de la modernité* created by big cities. As Benjamin points out:

La masse est un des arcanes qui sont ouverts à la prostitution qu'avec la

grande ville. La prostitution donne la possibilité d'une communion mythique avec la masse. La prostitution semble en même temps avoir en elle l'aptitude à survivre dans un espace vital où les objets d'usage quotidien sont devenus de plus en plus des articles de masse. La femme même est devenue, avec la prostitution des grandes villes, un article de masse. C'est cette caractéristique tout à fait nouvelle de la vie des grandes villes qui donne sa vraie signification à la reprise chez Baudelaire du dogme du péché originel. Le concept le plus ancien parut aux yeux de Baudelaire assez éprouvé pour maîtriser un phénomène parfaitement nouveau et parfaitement déconcertant.¹⁰²

Big cities create a greater space for prostitution. Modern cities impose loneliness and alienation on individuals. There women become commodities. Such observations find echoes in Dix's many prostitute-paintings. Dix's *Metropolis (Triptych)*, 1927-28 (fig.27), is a perfect illustration of this mythical communion with the masses via prostitution. Dix's painting depicts the equivalence between prostitutes and mass commodity, the worship of materialism, as well as being a reminder of sacrilege.

Metropolis is composed of three panels showing simultaneous scenes from Berlin life in the twenties. The central panel depicts the prosperity of city-life and the jazz-dance fever that grips Berlin high society during the years of the Weimar Republic. The two side-panels depict the reality of the other side: poverty, (First World) War cripples, prostitutes. Triptychs were the altarpiece-format used in Old Master paintings; that is, in images of religion and redemption. Dix chooses this compositional device formerly used for sacred purposes to depict modern city-life scenes that are hedonistic, depraved, decadent, miserable. This has now become the sacred; the new religion of modernity. Instead of the Holy Virgin and saints now the tragic figures of prostitutes populate the Triptych. Eva Karcher describes *Metropolis*'s 'corps de femmes':

Nous y cherchons plus précisément des constantes dans la manière dont les corps de femmes – il y a un type dominant pour chacune des parties du

tableau – sont représentés. L’effort d’ostentation de l’individu et le degré d’aliénation de soi apparaissent avec une telle évidence dans tout le tableau qu’on peut déceler le mécanisme sur lequel tout cela repose, et qui consiste à offrir son propre corps comme une marchandise – ainsi que cela se pratique dans la prostitution moderne.¹⁰³

Most of Dix’s work is centred on the body. In *Metropolis* Dix underlines the strict connection between city and body. For Dix, the city produces such bodies. In the central panel the ladies with their hair fashionably cut *à la garçon*, their low *décolletés*, their Charleston dresses and jewellery are intent on having a good time. They symbolise the opulence of the few that are oblivious of any outside misery. These emancipated, hardened women are available on their own terms, because they are wealthy and modern. The women on either side-panel are also available – only here their availability is through their professions and comes at different prices. The left panel shows the street-walkers looking for customers, anyone will do even war-cripples. The right one shows the more expensive luxury prostitutes that cater for a select clientèle and can afford to give alms to a broken beggar. In all three panels Dix highlights offered female sexuality symbolised in the pieces of fur and feathers with which he adorns these figures. Even the trumpets in the central panel do not look innocent, music is a prelude to erotic activity and a form of intoxicating death for the senses.

La prostitution entre en possession de nouveaux arcanes avec la naissance des grandes villes. Un de ces arcanes est le caractère labyrinthique de la ville elle-même. Le labyrinthe, dont l’image est gravée dans le corps du flâneur, apparaît avec la prostitution sous des couleurs nouvelles. Le premier arcane qui s’ouvre à elle est donc l’aspect mythique de la grande ville, en tant que labyrinthe. En son centre se trouve [...] une image du Minotaure. Que celui-ci mette à mort l’individu n’est pas décisif. Ce qui l’est, c’est l’image des forces mortelles qu’il incarne. Et cela aussi est pour l’habitant de la grande ville quelque chose de nouveau.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, Benjamin evokes a ‘correspondance’ between mythic and archaic, forms such as the labyrinth and Minotaur (in the above), and the new, modern

city-life. In doing this Benjamin underlines repetition in difference. History repeats itself under different guises giving the illusion of novelty. It borrows from history as progress only to show what it has borrowed is a ruin. Benjamin's evocation of the labyrinth is also a reminder of ancient man's capacity to lose one's way and risk being devoured by what is unknown and monstrous: the Minotaur. This risk is being repeated in the here and now. The labyrinth has become transformed into the big city with its destructive amusements. This is illustrated in Dix's *Metropolis*. *Metropolis* shows the stark reality of the big city which is the labyrinth of pleasure and pain from which its inhabitants cannot escape. (Dix is describing Berlin, Benjamin describes Paris: both are the big cities of modernity *par excellence*.) The difference between the inside, central panel, and the outside side panels, hardly matters. The 'forces mortelles' suggested by Benjamin, as characteristic of big cities, are depicted by Dix in all three panels. These are the forces of dehumanisation and decadence, they are active and equal, only the circumstances differ.

In *Metropolis*'s right panel Dix paints a classical architecture that appears to be shrinking in reference to a fading past glory. *Metropolis* also suggests Dix's consciousness of history as repetition, of archaic traces that are carried forward in modern man's psyche, of correspondences between a rupture with the past (through this crumbling classical architecture depicted in the painting) and the feverish need for future progress and novelty. At the same time the altarpiece format turns the image into an allegory of religion that is an image of hedonistic worship, and not of religious spirituality. Adorno eloquently describes this need to go back in time:

The formal immanence of antique art is probably to be explained by the fact that the sensual world had not yet been debased by sexual taboos, which would come to encompass a sphere reaching far beyond its own immediate area; Baudelaire's classicist longing is precisely for that. In capitalism, what forces art against art into an alliance with the vulgar is not only a function of commercialism, which exploits a mutilated sexuality, but equally the dark side of Christian inwardness.¹⁰⁵

In this sense the classical architecture in *Metropolis* also becomes a nostalgic sigh for a once-upon-a-time unrestricted sensuality and carefree sexual pleasure that can be no more in its pure sense. It is a form of nostalgic remembrance and a revolt against vulgar commercialism; the new religion of modernity. For Adorno, this is one reason for Baudelaire's 'correspondances', they measure present values through past freedoms. Dix's altarpiece format brings home the existence of an underlying 'Christian inwardness' and sense of 'sexual taboo', but as parody, making a mockery out of this false religiosity. Even though modern society in the big city can practice the same sensual pleasures of ancient Greece and Rome freely, unlike the latter societies it is aware that such pleasure bears the traces of the 'dogme du péché original'.¹⁰⁶ It is not purely hedonistic but largely material-based and therefore vulgar.

Dix's *Dreie Dirne auf der Straße*, 1925 (*Three Prostitutes on the Street*, fig.28), shows three women walking the street with a shop-window as a backdrop reflection of their commodity status.

Sous la forme que la prostitution a prise dans les grandes villes, la femme [...] apparaît [...] comme un article de masse. Cela est indiqué par le travestissement artificiel de l'expression individuelle au profit d'une expression professionnelle qui est l'œuvre du maquillage. [...] La prostituée ne se trouve jamais dans le bordel, mais la rue.¹⁰⁷

With the advent of modernity city prostitution no longer hides itself but spills out onto the streets exhibiting itself as mass-commodity through over adornment, frills, heavy make-up, eccentric clothing, as Benjamin underlines and Dix illustrates. Dix's street-women are dressed to imitate high society. There is a hardness about their femininity. One carries a tiny dog. The second clutches a purse with one hand and with the other draws the folds of her skirt into what unmistakably appears as a phallic-shape aimed towards the first. With this duality of purse and phallus Dix suggests how this lady fills her purse. At the same time the phenomenon of the purse is relatively new among the poorer

classes. Female purses start to become produced *en masse* towards the end of the 1920s and early 1930s. Prior to this women from non-affluent backgrounds carried money in their petticoats or aprons. The clutched purse is indicative of modernity with its rise of accessible fashion, female independence, and the ambition for a classless society. Ladies have now taken possession of their earnings. The third lady actually holds a phallus (made of metal or plastic). Symbolic meanings: unrestrained libido, materialism and modernity, fetishism and sexual ambiguity, travel across these female figures via dog, purse, and phallus. These female creatures epitomise modern society. All three have alienated vacant expressions on their faces. They are marionette-like figures that repeatedly perform certain rituals automatically. The vitrine behind them exhibits a leg with what must be the latest shoe-creation – stressing the iconic value of the body as object.

Dix paints a fascinatingly ambiguous image. These creatures surround their bodies with objects that add to the commercial value of their femininity on the one hand. On the other, the objects they use are suggestive and assume a fetishist role, a personality of their own. It becomes uncertain whether desire is aroused by the actual woman or by what she wears. It is not clear whether the phallic shapes mean that these women are looking for men, or that these are symbols of their own emancipation, bisexuality, and revolt against men: their (pretence at) the exploitation of men. The shoe-clad leg is in itself another ambiguous motif. It represents commodity, fashion, fetishism, and reflects the ‘article de masse’ condition of these women. Dix’s image shows the beginnings of bodily-fragmentation through the metonyms of phallus, leg with shoe, which were fast becoming a common language in art. This fragmentation illustrated in art reflects a social condition of the breaking up of human relations that have become increasingly based upon mercenary values.

Le monde des objets qui entoure l’homme prend de façon toujours plus

brutale l'expression de la marchandise. En même temps, la publicité tend à effacer le caractère marchand des choses. La défiguration des choses, qui les transforme en quelque chose d'allégorique, s'oppose à la transformation trompeuse du monde des marchandises. La marchandise cherche à se voir elle-même en face. Elle célèbre son humanisation dans la prostituée.¹⁰⁸

According to Benjamin, commodities are deceptively cast as glamorous objects and prostitutes come to represent the human form of modern commodity-philosophy which has become the social norm.

Dix's work mainly revolves around the portrayal of the human condition and aspects of social reality that are taking place in Berlin (and by extension other big cities in Germany and elsewhere in Europe) through his figurations of the feminine. Although elements of fragmentation are scattered about and a pronounced decay of humanity is present in most of Dix's work, nevertheless his work is largely figurative and whole.

Just like Dix most of Bellmer's work centres on the body, but in contrast to Dix, fragmentation and exaggerated deformation are common. All of the aspects discussed earlier: decay, *memento mori*, alienation, crisis of sexual identity, perversion, reification, fetishism – are present in Bellmer's work. All are expressed through the female body. Prostitutes are omnipresent in Dix's paintings. In his essay on Hoffmann and Offenbach, Adorno mentions that in Viennese jargon *Pupperln* and *Dirnen* (dolls and prostitutes) mean the same.¹⁰⁹ Bellmer's doll is the commodity which he also sells since he photographs her in erotic scenes and sells the images. At the same time there is an ambiguity in Bellmer's actions. Bellmer is emotionally attached to his dolls: they are a part of himself, yet he needs to produce, make money and live off his commodity-product through his perverse photography of her. Bellmer's dolls are not modelled after a live image, nor are they the finished work. In one way Bellmer's dolls are similar to Hoffmann's Olympia in that they are created by the artist and used to create a scenario-narrative and entertain. Echoing

Hoffmann's and Dix's *corps-femme de la modernité*, Bellmer's dolls can be seen to express a social reality and a human condition. In comparison to Hoffmann and Dix whose female representations highlight and embody social conditions, Bellmer's dolls represent a fragment of totality expressing a position of rebellion and a reflection of what is going on in society through the isolation of one figure, its reification, and alienation. 'The fragment is that part of the totality of the work that opposes totality.'¹¹⁰ The prostitute, the lesbian are modern heroic-figures of protest against an alienated, desensitised and technologically-oriented society in Baudelaire's eyes, as the fragments opposing a social whole they represent a dynamic of resistance. In Dix's paintings these *femme-corps de la modernité* are marginalized, yet very much a part of society. They communicate, even if in a decadent sense. By comparison Bellmer's dolls are frozen, reified objects in the feminine. They are outside of society because they have no possibility to communicate: like Hoffmann's Olympia but much worse. The dolls – I refer here to the figure itself without Bellmer's staged-narrative – are dialectical images at a standstill: historical continuity that comes to a halt as fragmented ruin. Bellmer's dolls are allegorical and ambiguous in that they are fragments opposing totality and are simultaneously the socio-historical trace of this totality; that is, the result of a society. Applying Adorno's words to Bellmer's dolls these embody art's 'relation to the world' and 'art's repudiation of that world'.¹¹¹ The dolls are made from material that is available in the world; that belongs to this world, yet through their deformation, fragmentation, and alteration, they embody a repudiation of this world and its images. That is, they take from the material and images of the world and turn this, for example, into decayed structures and ruin.

Traces in Bellmer's dolls can be taken in two senses – as explained in the previous section. The first is in Benjamin's sense. There traces belong to the past that erupts in the present. That is, the dolls contain buried memories of past-elements: Kleist, Hoffmann, fables, childhood – since dolls also belong to

childhood. Benjamin's trace is part of the ambiguity that makes up a dialectical image made up of the past and the need to create in the present for posterity under new forms, and through new narratives.

Only a thoughtless observer can deny that correspondences come into play between the world of modern technology and the archaic symbol-world of mythology. Of course, initially the technologically new seems nothing more than that. But in the very next childhood memory, its traits are already altered. Every childhood achieves something great and irreplaceable for humanity. By the interest it takes in technological phenomena, by the curiosity it displays before any sort of invention or machinery, every childhood binds the accomplishments of technology to the old worlds of symbol. There is nothing in the realm of nature that from the outset would be exempt from such a bond. Only, it takes form not in the aura of novelty but in the aura of the habitual. In memory, childhood, and dream.¹¹²

Dolls are part of the habitual realm of childhood. According to Benjamin every childhood (birth of a new generation, a new epoch) alters the traits of the habitual, adds new fantasy and ideas to an already-there technology. At the same time this childhood, this new generation combines technological experimentation with symbolism and myth transforming them into a new form – coming out of childhood dreams – which in turn becomes part of the everyday.

One example of Bellmer's dolls illustrating Benjamin's observations is *The Centre of the Doll*, 1935-37 (fig. 29). It combines several elements that make it ambiguous and allegorical. It uses technology innovatively as art in its modern material: aluminium (painted). It represents a habitual concept taken from literature and childhood: a doll; and bases it on the antique-timeless figure of the nude. It is a piece of sculpture on a pedestal in the form of a torso bringing to mind correspondences with fragmented remnants of antique statues. It is a hybrid fragment of the feminine: hybridity belongs to the world of myth and monsters. Bellmer creates a work whose truth lies in its multiple meanings. It borrows its formal-structure from the history of art but is produced in the

material-language of modern technology. It parodies classical sculpture in the same way as Dix's *Metropolis (Triptych)* parodies religious altarpieces. The same applies for the subject: a female-nude. Bellmer's female figure is reduced to sexual organs that are doubled like mythological Indian fertility Goddesses with multiple sexual organs. *The Centre of the Doll* is a Baroque-minimalism of excess and reduction. It is as erotic as antique Old Master nude-sculptures (perhaps even more so in contemporary eyes) except that its eroticism lies in the very violence which distorts and doubles this fragmented female-body. Bellmer constructs his figure in such a way that its physical hybridity reflects its ideological hybridity. *The Centre of the Doll* is a dialectical image where the traces of old elements are transformed and added to creating a new form that is a visual play of correspondences.

The second sense of traces here is Adorno's: the effect of the image, the ideas it gives off. In *The Centre of the Doll* the trace in Adorno's sense can be read as the violence done to the female figure, its reduction to an abundant eroticism, or the pain that the image gives off through its dehumanised distorted form. It is these traces that are ambiguous and need to be analysed dialectically in order to recognise what is going on – and possibly rectify this. As with Hoffmann and Dix, Bellmer's doll constitutes a human condition that includes Baudelaire's correspondences made up of a past-nostalgia and a thirst for novelty comprising memory, experience and loss of tradition. With Hoffmann the human condition, via the feminine, shows the beginnings of the decline and disintegration that comes with progress. Dix's feminine depicts the decay, decline, drama of the alienated human condition that is setting in. Bellmer shows all of this negativity already in its advanced stages: his female figures show a human condition that has gone terribly wrong. The entire space of Bellmer's work brings negativity to the fore. Unlike Hoffmann and to a lesser extent Dix, Bellmer's work allows no room to breathe any positive difference.

The Centre of the Doll is no exception. It embodies a concentrated loss of

subjectivity, alienation, reification, violation of humanity and the body, abuse (sexual and mental), all the result of technology, industrialisation, totalitarianism, fascism (Hitler), on one side of the dialectic. On the other – in the twisted torso on a pedestal – it represents the pride mankind (totalitarian society) takes in technological advances, its egoism and unawareness of the human cost, its indifference to individual suffering.

L'allégorie chez Baudelaire, au contraire de l'allégorie baroque porte les traces de la rage intérieure qui était nécessaire pour faire irruption dans ce monde et pour briser et ruiner ses créations harmonieuses.¹¹³

In Bellmer, Baudelaire's 'traces de la rage intérieure' have become *extérieure* showing actual conditions; what is left from the 'créations harmonieuses' that are already shattered and in ruins. Of course redemption to either philosopher would have to be in political change. Bellmer says that his dolls are physiological representations of psychological states.¹¹⁴ In this light *The Centre of the Doll* has now become, via Benjamin and Adorno, a plastic physiological representation of the truth of the violence of current social conditions.

All of Bellmer's dolls show some form of the experience of violence. There the ruin of harmony is the dissonance that expresses the expressions of rage, of alienation, of the destruction of identity that dominate society in the wake of Hitler's rise to power, of technological advances, the loss of aura and spirituality. *Die Puppe*, 1934 (fig.30), represents an advanced stage of fragmentation due to an already disintegrated society. The girlish bow in both cases points to a retarded adolescence. The broken body of this *Puppe* points to sterility.

Le thème fondamental du *modern style* est la transfiguration de la stérilité. Le corps est dessiné de préférence sous les formes qui précèdent la maturité sexuelle. Il faut rattacher cette idée à celle de l'interprétation régressive de la technique.¹¹⁵

Here sterility is not necessarily simply that of the body, it is also metaphor for a mental-state, human relations, creativity and culture, the spirit of the time. Again technology seems to blame for everything, progress brings with it decline even in art.

In fig.31, a work of the same 1934 series *Die Puppe*, shows a pair of doll's legs with one high-heeled shoe placed on lace with a pearl, a rose on sliding underwear, and a piece of string. In Dix's *Dreie Dirne auf der Straße* one sees a leg and high-heeled shoe in a vitrine. It is as if fig.31 represents a post-history for Dix's painting. There Bellmer concentrates all the meanings in *Dreie Dirne auf der Straße* within an image that echoes a fragment from Dix's painting. (I have no idea whether Bellmer does this with Dix's painting in mind, or this is just a striking coincidence. In any case Bellmer would have been familiar with Dix's work.) In his paintings, Dix uses similar narrative devices as in Old Master paintings. For example, motifs in one part of the work are reflected in another and symbolic meanings travel across the work. In *Dreie Dirne auf der Straße*: the leg and shoe-fetish reflect phallic metonyms dispersed among the figures of the three prostitutes. There time is taken to narrate, a chronology of sorts is still respected, and there exists some coherence between foreground and background.

In Bellmer's case the structure of visual narrative has changed enormously. It has become almost minimalist in structure though not in content. This tension between structure and content makes the work even more disturbing. All is being said at once on a fragmentary image 'that opposes totality'.¹¹⁶ Past traces, fetishism, prostitution, phallic symbolism, sensual pleasure, erotic perversion or sexual violence are all there. The image becomes an allegory of the modern sterility in human relations evoked by Benjamin. To Benjamin, the Paris arcades represented nineteenth-century advances in construction and technology. Now Bellmer's doll embodies the destruction and experience of violence done to the human subject in the wake of such advances used in the service of nationalist

ambitions and the furthering of political power.

In this second part of my chapter I have discussed various ideas: redemption, fragmentation, traces, memory, experience, based on Benjamin's and (to a lesser extent) Adorno's writings mainly in relation to images of the *corps-femme de la modernité*. These theoretical ideas have been used to discuss a selection of texts (Hoffmann, Baudelaire) and visual images (Dix, Bellmer) based on the feminine body and ideas on materialism. For the sake of some form of completion it is necessary to go beyond body-images to the poetic and to what surrounds the body. Therefore, I would like to turn to the second strand constituting Benjamin's thought; the angelic and theological strand. I discuss and link this to other texts and images – those of Parmiggiani. Most of the theory discussed above will be relevant in the next section in addition to other ideas.

Parmiggiani's work depicts several Benjaminian concepts already discussed (traces, memory, tradition, experience), as well as containing open references to angels and the spiritual. Of course there are differences between Benjamin's and Parmiggiani's views on and in their treatment of the same issues – apart from the media used and the difference in epoch. (Parmiggiani is born three years after Benjamin's tragic suicide in 1940.)

PART III: CLAUDIO PARMIGGIANI & THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

Claudio Parmiggiani (1943-) was born in Luzzara, Italy. He studied at the Art Institute of Modena. In Modena his first solo-exhibitions took place in the years between 1962 and 1965. From the beginning of his artistic career Parmiggiani maintained an autonomous position rarely exhibiting with other artists of his generation. He continues to exhibit his work around the world and insists that his work should not to be classified within a specific context.

Writing about Parmiggiani, Catherine Grenier explains how at times he comes close to Kafka:

A great admirer of Kafka, for whom 'everyday things [are] expressed in tragic terms and tragedy in a frozen form,' Parmiggiani pursues a superior sense of humanity within the limits of human condition. [...] His outlook [...] is poetic. [...] He chooses subversion as his instrument instead of revolt or negation. He instills contradiction into the heart of a work, as if only our blindness, our rationalist view of art, hinders our ability to resolve opposites. [...] Irrationality, mystery, are only expressions restored to the awareness of an imperceptible reality instigated by poetry and art.¹¹⁷

Like Hoffmann, Baudelaire, Dix, and Bellmer, Parmiggiani expresses a human condition through his art. Unlike them it is not centred on any specific human figure. Like their work, Parmiggiani's work also contains correspondences, memory, traces. However, Parmiggiani uses these concepts differently. Hoffmann, Baudelaire, Dix, and Bellmer use them as elements to communicate through their work and structure it. Parmiggiani makes them the objects of his work. Parmiggiani's work involves an enchanted everyday that projects poetry, the imagination, time as invisible presences through the fragmentation of objects, traces, and the joining of disparate objects together that appear as remnants from some ruin. Visible and invisible projections that are very much part of the artwork, produce a metamorphosis of the original meaning of the objects they engulf, and can be seen as a violence, as harbingers of catastrophe. In this sense Parmiggiani comes close to Kafka and Benjamin's theological strand on history as ruin and catastrophe.

Benjamin's preoccupation with the angelic, the spiritual, history, traces, memory, and time are themes that most of Parmiggiani's works problematise and expose as art. Of course their definitions of these themes differ, as does their approach. Parmiggiani consciously uses his readings of Benjamin, in addition to Tertullian, Dante, Baudelaire, Kafka, Lorca, Pound, Elmiro Zolla, as reference-

traces in his works – among a multitude of other musical, artistic, geographical, ethnological, scientific references. My concern here is mainly with concepts such as: angels, spirit, history, time, memory, traces, in Parmiggiani's art which I analyse mainly through his writings. I also relate his work to Benjamin's ideas on these concepts, as well as to ideas from Adorno and Gianni Vattimo. Two concepts of utmost importance to Parmiggiani are memory and time (related to all others: angels, history, culture). Both memory and time are detectable through their trace-effects. Memory is reconstructed through the traces of events: actual and imagined, as a distorted form of quotation from the past. Time makes its appearance felt through the traces it leaves behind, the decay it perpetuates. Both involve violence. Memory and time constantly appear in Parmiggiani's work through traces he deliberately creates to indicate their effects on creativity and the imagination.

As I have discussed the coexistence of the old with the new, traces left in spaces that have been dwelt in, as well as traces of objects and events effecting those that experience them are recurring themes in Benjamin's thought, as well as the tight link between traces and remembering. 'L'homme nouveau porte en lui toute la quintessence des formes anciennes, et ce qui se constitue dans la confrontation avec un environnement issu de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle, dans les rêves comme dans les phrases et les images de certains artistes, c'est un être que l'on pourrait appeler l'«homme meublé».'¹¹⁸ Man comes into this world already furnished with knowledge, with fragmented memories of a primordial and a historical past that he picks up as he develops from his surroundings. 'Habiter signifie laisser des traces.'¹¹⁹ Traces accumulate in the world and every new generation inherits from and adds to them. The most visible expression of these traces, for the old in the new, must lie in man's creativity, and therefore finds a voice in works of art, literature, music, architecture.

On art Parmiggiani states: 'Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait d'autre message à transmettre que la trace de notre passage brûlant, le signe de notre condition de

comètes, rien d'autre à transmettre que notre solitude. Nous avançons comme des aveugles.'¹²⁰ To Parmiggiani art itself is the trace of the artist's present absence or his absent presence, as indeed every object created, every text written are traces of their authors and of humanity. For Benjamin artworks contain traces of a past and indicate a future. For Adorno traces are the ideas coming from the work, its memory and effects. Art: the work itself to Parmiggiani, is the trace or imprint of the artist's presence in the world. At the same time in his work, Parmiggiani creates traces that are past presences, in Benjamin's sense. In turn, these Benjaminian traces in Parmiggiani's contemporary contexts give off traces that are ideas, memory-effects in Adorno's sense as I will show in the next section.

Interpreting Parmiggiani: Angelic Spaces, Traces, Violence, and Illumination

As an introduction to Parmiggiani's visual work and a link to Benjamin's theological strand I start with one of Parmiggiani's poems. The reasons for my choosing to do this are given by Parmiggiani in the following statement which reflects his creative philosophy: 'La poésie est l'autre face de la peinture, elle est la voix de l'image. Les mots des poètes nous aident à nous sentir moins seuls et à nous convaincre que l'homme est divin au moins autant que Dieu.'¹²¹ With these simple phrases Parmiggiani underlines the inseparable relation between two different forms of language: poetry and painting; and defines the sacred in terms of the profane – elements that occupy Benjamin's intellectual life. Another reason for starting with one of his poems is that there I find a reflection of several of the ideas Parmiggiani strives to express in his art, and ideas that occupy Benjamin.

Quelque fois la vérité que je cherchais je l'ai rencontrée dans un rêve.
 D'autres fois je me suis retrouvé comme si j'avais lutté contre un ange,
 comme si mon esprit était prisonnier d'un symbole, en des lieux où il est
 possible de voir en même temps et le ciel et les entrailles de l'homme.
 Dans ces obscures géométries où l'on entrevoit la Nature éclairant un
 sentier nocturne, un homme voûté qui en calque l'empreinte, un autre, la
 tête dans l'incendie, qui s'enfuit en tenant dans ses mains un soleil.
 Je me souviens alors d'une ville blanche, ceinte de murailles noires, où
 des hommes peints s'interrogent sur les origines de leur propre silence, de
 ces antiques images où Adam tourne dans les diagrammes d'Agrippa,
 tandis que la longue chevelure d'Ève s'enroule parmi les planètes; je me
 souviens encore de celles où un escalier de pain monte de la Terre
 jusqu'au bord de la cratère de la lune.
 J'ai dressé des bûchers de couleur aux arcs-en-ciel de la beauté solitaire, je
 vis du secret de la lumière et de l'ombre.¹²²

What springs to mind from Parmiggiani's poem – no. VIII, in a group of poems entitled *In Sogno* from 1987 – is the power of its imagery, and a closeness to Benjamin's other world stemming from a theological and spiritual realm, with the Angel of History and revelation as its central figure. There 'l'Ange a donné à voir le non-visible, l'inconscient de la modernité'.¹²³ Inspired by Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*, Benjamin's Angel is a violent one 'who preferred to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy by giving to them, to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction'.¹²⁴

Parmiggiani's poetic image of the struggle with an angel opens up a vision of history as non-chronology, of history as catastrophe. The struggle with an angel is a theme borrowed from the Bible; from man's sacred past. Parmiggiani forces this into a present and human context, and into man's struggle with the divine within himself in order for creative acts (here poetry) to shine through and become visible objects. This is similar to the artwork seen as profane illumination in Benjamin's terms; that is, man's imitation of the divine through creativity. However Benjamin's religious convictions and his belief in a beyond, do not actually exist in Parmiggiani's work. On religious and sacred references in his work, Parmiggiani states:

Le spirituel que certains entrevoient dans mon travail je l'appellerais simplement une conviction faisant partie d'une vision: un mysticisme sans foi. Je ne pense pas à un art religieux mais à une religiosité de l'art, une religiosité dont le sens semble s'être totalement égaré.¹²⁵

According to Parmiggiani, there is a spirituality in art, poetry, music, whose very essence has become dispersed. Irrespective of any religion or the need to express the religious in art, creativity itself is spirituality. Yet somehow man has become oblivious of the sacred that lies in the very act of living, and in the act of creating. Parmiggiani considers that the divine in art lies in its very making, in the here and now, without needing to look backwards nor beyond ourselves, but rather within ourselves.

Parmiggiani's poetic images entitled *In Sogno: VIII* are not the dream images of an utopian dialectics at a standstill discussed by Benjamin in *Paris, die Hauptstadt des XIX Jahrhunderts*; they are history revealing itself all of a sudden at some present moment through memory and correspondences (in Baudelaire's sense: an eruption of the archaic in the present and its dissipation there). Benjamin's dream images represent historical materialism, Parmiggiani's poetic images are immaterial dreams. The poem illustrates how historical memory operates as a non-chronological, irrational, mysterious accumulation, and man's ambiguous, fragmented, often strange, relation to history and time through the creative act of remembering. *In Sogno: VIII* is full of contrasts: light and dark, illumination and catastrophe, sacred and profane. For example, the second stanza's lines start with an illumination of darkness: 'Dans ces obscures géométries où [...] la Nature éclairant un sentier nocturne', and end with a surrealist image of catastrophe: a man fleeing his head in flames while holding the sun in his hands. 'Obscures géométries' is not meant just literally to balance and contrast with 'la Nature éclairant un sentier nocturne'; it is also used metaphorically, to emphasize the strange mystery that is man's existence and destiny in this world and beyond. (It can also be read as mythology's labyrinth

remembered – a form Benjamin brings up in *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* and in *Das Passagenwerk*. Parmiggiani also creates convoluted and geometric passageways as land art. One example is: *La Grande Pietra*, 1983 (fig.32), in Egypt.)

There is a strong mystical dimension in the whole of *In Sogno*: VIII which the second stanza echoes. There the use of fire evokes healing and mystical powers, as well as destructive and annihilatory capacities. Both fire and sun are different forms of the same matter belonging to separate realms: earth and sky. In this sense Parmiggiani is underlining man's existence confined to earth yet desiring to reach the heavens, to transcend his earthly confinement. There is also a sacred-profane dimension. The worship of the fire and the sun are religious practices not only belonging to ancient and more recent cults (Aztecs, Incas) but still practised today (Zoroastrians in the Far East). Practices that were and still are sacred to some, and profane to others. Fire also points to Parmiggiani's historical memory; to Giordano Bruno's funeral pyre: 'Le feu me rappelle toujours un seul et même nom: Giordano Bruno.'¹²⁶ In other words, the sacred and profane exist in man, the past exists in man – irrespective of his beliefs. The poem's images embody a compression in time, a remembrance of history which takes on surrealist imagery. These images are punctuated by subjective actions such as: 'je cherchais,' 'j'ai rencontré,' 'je me suis retrouvé,' 'j'avais lutté,' 'je me souviens alors,' 'je me souviens encore,' 'j'ai dressé,' 'je vis'. That is, man's sporadic interventions appear as traces of his existence in time and place that strive to connect him to history, to the world, to humanity only to dissolve into light and shadow.

There is a resemblance between Parmiggiani's poetic images and 'le monde complémentaire de Kafka ou de Klee, celui du «nain théologique», celui de l'Ange' which is 'non dialectique', and points to 'l'interruption d'histoire, la catastrophe, l'inhumain et la dehiscence-déperdition du sujet'.¹²⁷ This resemblance lies in the images of, among others, truth encountered in a dream,

the struggle with an angel, the simultaneous vision of sky and human-insides. The simultaneous vision of sky and human-insides represents religious and profane illumination. Human-insides contain the most profane illumination which Benjamin describes as ‘cette drogue terrible entre toutes – nous-mêmes – que nous absorbions dans la solitude’.¹²⁸ Memory and the forgetting that accompanies memory also lie within us as Parmiggiani stresses through a double: ‘je me souviens’ and ‘je me souviens encore’. Memory joins the past to the present, forgetting fragments this process inserting discontinuities within it, producing the tempest that blows from Kafka’s ‘pays de l’oubli’ that disperses and fragments objects.¹²⁹ The redemption of mankind’s prehistory and origin requires work that takes place through remembering, through the hard task of not forgetting. Study and thought result in the repetitive (re)writing of history – one form of which is literature, others are art and music. ‘Car du pays de l’oubli souffle une tempête. Étudier, c’est chevaucher contre cette tempête. [...] Le retour en arrière est la direction de l’étude, qui transforme la vie en écriture.’¹³⁰

Parmiggiani is not redeeming the past, for him it simply exists as present. His sky leads to the celestial realm of paradise from which the history of mankind first originated – man’s true *Urgeschichte*. In actually naming Adam and Eve, Parmiggiani indicates man’s belief (true or false) in an origin and eventual destiny that goes back to some primordial (Biblical) time. This remembering, this looking upwards towards the skies for the divine, also requires looking within oneself; into one’s ‘entrailles’ and thinking which are difficult tasks. Parmiggiani’s poem – like his visual work – is a rewriting of history in terms of memory and its dissolution. This is expressed in *Tempo e non-tempo* (time and no-time):

Se placer hors du temps ne signifie pas se mettre en relation avec un passé quelconque mais avec le temps, qui est mémoire, et *mémoire* ne signifie pas passé mais *pensée*. Mettre en contact des formes lointaines, dans le temps et dans l’esprit, faire se rencontrer un temps et un autre temps, créer des courts-circuits: une autre idée du temps.

Le temps c'est la mort qui se dessine avec cruauté sur un visage, mais il n'est pas facile de prononcer le mot temps, passé, quand tout n'est que présent. Quand il suffirait de cligner les yeux pour se retrouver à côté de Mozart à Salzbourg ou de Goethe à Weimar; quand ne mettant bout à bout que sept de mes vies, on pourrait entendre le dernier cri de Giordano Bruno sur le bûcher du Campo dei Fiori.
Le temps est ce que nous connaissons le moins.¹³¹

Parmiggiani's concept of time is memory which means thinking, and the present. Everything is seen from the present's perspective, memory starts with the present. It is the present that leads one to think the past – in Benjamin's words it is an origin. The difference lies in that for Parmiggiani every present moment is an origin for the thinking that is memory that dissolves the past; that is, makes it present. For Benjamin, in addition to traces of the past that exist in the present, there are also specific moments in history: the Baroque, the nineteenth century, that are origins and catastrophic interruptions. Parmiggiani and Benjamin are very strongly conscious of the past and its presence in the present, differently. Benjamin wants to redeem the past from the present. Parmiggiani considers the past in its actual state; that is, as present.

In Sogno: VIII may not directly echo the tempest Benjamin calls progress blowing towards his Angel of History but there are correspondences because of the irrational accumulation of historical events and ruins evoked there.¹³² In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (posthumous 1940, *Sur le concept de l'histoire*) Benjamin describes his Angel of History:

Il existe un tableau de Klee qui s'intitule «Angelus Novus». Il représente un ange qui semble sur le point de s'éloigner de quelque chose qu'il fixe du regard. Ses yeux sont écarquillés, sa bouche ouverte, ses ailes déployées. C'est à cela que doit ressembler l'Ange de l'Histoire. Son visage est tourné vers le passé. Là où nous apparaît une chaîne d'événements, il ne voit lui, qu'une seule et unique catastrophe, qui sans cesse amoncelle ruines sur ruines et les précipite à ses pieds. Il voudrait bien s'attarder, réveiller les morts et rassembler ce qui a été démembré. Mais du paradis souffle une tempête qui s'est prise dans ses ailes, si

violemment que l'ange ne peut plus les refermer. Cette tempête le pousse irrésistiblement vers l'avenir auquel il tourne le dos, tandis que le monceau de ruines devant lui s'élève jusqu'au ciel. Cette tempête est ce que nous appelons le progrès.¹³³

This tempest pushes the Angel violently in the direction of the future representing the spiral of time that progresses forward and cannot be stopped. It is not progress in the sense of a positive advancement of mankind's conditions as time proceeds, but the heaping of catastrophes on top of each other in time because of man's inability to learn from the past in spite of the Angel turning his head towards that past as a *devoir de mémoire*. It also signals a progress towards the end – of time. This tempest blowing from paradise represents the progress of history as catastrophe. The Angel's head is turned to a past under the threat of being forgotten and not dealt with sufficiently, while his body is helplessly blown towards a future he gives his back to and refuses to face. The advance of time is against the Angel. This tempest is the same tempest that is blowing in Kafka's 'pays de l'oubli'. The further man goes in time, in the future, the greater is his forgetting of the past, be it as Biblical origin or as original history.

'Pays de l'oubli' can mean either paradise where memory is unnecessary and all worry and pain is forgotten, or a metaphor for the loss of memory about where we come from, and the events that took place before our existence as natural evolution and as world history. 'L'image vraie du passé passe en un éclair. On ne peut retenir le passé que dans une image qui surgit et s'évanouit pour toujours à l'instant même où elle s'offre à la connaissance.'¹³⁴ In other words, truth is ephemeral and fleeting and as soon as it reveals itself it fades into oblivion. Benjamin's Angel sees all this past and future that appear to humanity as a chain of events, as one long continuous catastrophe. *In Sogno*: VIII is not about progress in historical time, nor does this matter in the poem. It is about how everything that has happened is happening in the present; in the here and now. This present-happening takes place through the traces time leaves behind

and the images these evoke, the remembering and acknowledgement of fragments of Biblical tradition and history, since all is remembered and experienced within the present's context.

In Sogno: VIII is about the ephemerality of truth (as in a dream), of glimpsing the divine and the profane, of existence and history, of Adam and Eve (paradise and the expulsion from paradise). At the same time it is also about man himself, about his existence in the world, his struggle with the divine within himself, his version of the angel, his isolation, his thinking that is memory. Parmiggiani states, 'Divinity is rooted in the ground, in our mystery, in our depths. That is where our Olympus dwells; we are ancient and alone.'¹³⁵ *In Sogno*: VIII contains a zigzagging between man and the Biblical, man and Ancient history, man and the planets, man and the sky and earth, which also exists in Parmiggiani's artwork. This provides a recurring link between the macrocosmic (the universal or collective) and microcosmic (the particular or individual) where 'le corps de l'homme est toujours la moitié possible d'un atlas universel'.¹³⁶ In Parmiggiani's work, this link between man and the world, between man and history is in a state of dissolution because of the ephemerality of all existence and man's uncertainty of his place in the world.

Furthermore the different forms of dark and light played out in the poem: 'obscures géométries,' 'la Nature éclairant un sentier nocturne,' 'ville blanche ceinte de murailles noires,' 'l'incendie,' 'le soleil,' 'la cratère de la lune,' 'secret de la lumière et de l'ombre'; represent a duality of light and darkness and can be taken to represent differences in levels of illumination, knowledge and ignorance, remembering and forgetting.¹³⁷ The mythological, the prehistorical, and the classical are interspersed with the Biblical and the existential. 'Agrippa,' 'des antiques images,' 'des hommes peints' ('sur les murailles noires' is reminiscent of the painted figures on *The Caves of Lascaux*), Adam, Eve, bread, are all mixed together. The verse with Adam turning in the diagrams of Agrippa and Eve's hair spinning among the planets points to the creation of the world,

and to metamorphosis. All of these images are placed in a contemporary poetic context which also has a surrealist feel to it: an 'en rêve'. Parmiggiani's poem is one example of how he visualises the world around him. It is timeless and non-chronological, surrealist, mysterious and enchanting, catastrophic and violent, obscure with sudden ephemeral illuminating flashes, sacred and profane.

The poem expresses how the individual's, the artist's, mankind's place is certain only in its temporary existence, it is uncertain in its fate and relation to everything else including the self and memory.

Dans le passé il y a tout notre futur, mais ce lien avec le passé de l'art que l'on crut entrevoir dans certains de mes travaux n'a jamais existé. Je ne me suis jamais soucié de l'histoire ou du passé, que d'ailleurs je ne nomme pas *passé* mais *mémoire*, une profondeur dont l'avancée, passant outre, ne tient compte que marginalement de philologie et d'histoire. Une image poétique n'est-elle pas déjà, à elle seule, dans sa pureté, une sublimation de la forme et un réceptacle de la beauté historique? Un visage de statue, peint en noir, est peut-être un dialogue avec l'ombre et avec le temps, mais pas nécessairement avec le temps auquel la statue appartient. Une lumière sur le visage d'une statue ne parle peut-être pas seulement de la statue mais peut-être aussi de la lumière. Un visage, une voix, le mystère d'un signe trouvé en chemin, un fragment, une tête de statue antique: autant de choses qui partagent la même condition d'épaves à la dérive, de reliques, de lambeaux d'âme, et c'est précisément de cette condition, et non l'appartenance de ces objets à un temps déterminé, qui m'importe. [...].

Passé, présent, et futur à l'intérieur d'une œuvre vivent dans une seule dimension où le temps n'existe pas. Le sens du travail est orienté vers une idée de réalité ayant ses racines dans l'inconnue. Le sens même de la pensée appartient à une dimension qui nous est inconnue et dans la pensée le temps est vaincu.¹³⁸

Parmiggiani's phrase: 'dans le passé il y tout notre futur' is not the same as Benjamin's quotation of Michelet, 'chaque époque rêve la suivante', because the latter implies chronology and development with time – as Adorno had criticised in his letter to Benjamin discussed earlier.¹³⁹ Parmiggiani's statement perceives history as a compression of events, whether one looks forward or backwards

from some present moment does not matter. In other words, the past and the future are compressed into a present moment that is our only reality. Artworks, objects, texts, poems, music, are all read in a present context irrespective of when they were actually made. Parmiggiani also underlines differences in seeing objects: the light falling on a statue is also about light and its refractive, reflective qualities, not just about the statue. Behind one object there is always another less discernable, unnoticed, hidden. Often it is eclipsed by the first that might even owe its very existence to the second – here the statue owes its visibility to light. The tendency to pay attention to the most obvious and ignore the rest, to see what is easier, is an all too human quality in need of changing. Seeing has to be elevated to an art; to intuition, encompassing both the visible and the invisible. All objects past and present should be considered in their actual states of ruin, decay, imperfection; that is, as artworks that are also a result of time, of history, and of existing in the world. In other words, a Roman statue in its actual fragmented state is the work of art. Its reconstruction to an imagined former state, its restoration, are of no interest since they cancel its age, and its interaction with the world. This reconstruction constitutes an erasure of the traces of history; a falsification of history. All of these ideas including extending vision to the invisible as well as the visible, the contemporary status of past art, traces, thinking that is memory, time and non-time, timelessness, the equivalence of past and future frozen into a present moment are explored and exposed as art objects by Parmiggiani, as I now show.

In *Salita della Memoria*, 1976 (fig.33), Parmiggiani places a ladder on a white canvas leading to a framed image hung on the wall. The ladder is made out of bread, the image on the wall shows a multitude of stellar constellations. The title of the work is ambiguous because of the image it represents. *Salita* in Italian means ascending physically or in status. In the case of memory this denotes its resurfacing or simply the process of remembering. For this to happen one must go back in time. Remembrance involves work and effort since memory

is made up of voluntary memory, involuntary memory, and forgetting. In *Zum Bilde Prousts* (1929-32, *L'image proustienne*) Benjamin stresses the closeness of involuntary memory to forgetting rather than to remembering: 'La mémoire involontaire de Proust n'est-elle pas, en effet, plus proche de l'oubli que de ce qu'on appelle en général le souvenir?'¹⁴⁰ Involuntary memory is triggered off by a chance encounter, by an unexpected object. Through this not only what is forgotten suddenly starts resurfacing, but also what one does not realise existed in memory comes to light; that is, events or details one was unaware of noticing and absorbing. In this sense involuntary memory renders one conscious of what one thought was buried and forgotten, and of what one was unaware existed in the recesses of one's mind. Thinking in terms of voluntary and involuntary memory can be personal, historical, Biblical, cultural.

In *Salita della Memoria* the ladder placed between earth and heaven or sky (symbolically speaking) points to a repetitive ascending-descending. This suggested ascending-descending implies the constant remembering and forgetting that is personal and common to all mankind. It also indicates different types of memory including the personal and the collective. The fact that the ladder is made of bread is a metaphorical illustration of the short life of memory.

The actual story behind this work's creation and its title has a surrealist-dimension made up of dream and objective chance. Parmiggiani narrates:

I dreamed one night of a ladder of bread whose two extremities touched a white cloth, and, above it, a star-studded sky. I was under the sky, Kant's sky, in Germany in the dream. There were zoomorphic constellations in bronze with real stars. [...] the constellations were engraved by Dürer. [...] There were a throng of shadows of human beings [...]. These occupied the whole expanse of the sky like a huge Michaelangelo *Last Judgement*. A sky full of suppressed anxiety.... a universe inhabited by all the world's spirits, an infinite accumulation of those who had passed away, alive but silent in the sky, wafting shadows, almost a shadow of Humanity itself incumbent on the earth as if all of Humanity were

fluctuating inside a mercury mirror [...]. Later, in Brescia, I found a baker with an enormous oven, so I had him bake a ladder of bread over two meters long. Then I photographed the sky and leaned the ladder against the photograph. Then I read the name of the street, 'Salita della Memoria,' which led to the bakery shop and used it as a title.¹⁴¹

Parmiggiani's account corresponds to phrases from his later (1987) poem *In Sogno*: VIII discussed above: 'Quelque fois la vérité que je cherchais je l'ai rencontrée dans un rêve,' and 'je me souviens [...] où un escalier du pain monte de la Terre jusqu'à [...] la lune.' His phrase above: 'a universe inhabited by all the world's spirits, an infinite accumulation etc.,' is reminiscent of Benjamin's passage in *Franz Kafka* (1934):

Ce qui est oublié – et nous abordons ici un nouveau seuil de l'œuvre kafkaïenne – n'est jamais d'ordre purement individuel. Tout ce que l'on oublie se mêle à la réalité oubliée du monde primitif, s'unit à elle par des liens innombrables, incertains, changeants, pour produire des fruits toujours nouveaux. L'oubli est, dans les récits de Kafka, le réservoir d'où surgit à la lumière l'inépuisable intermonde: ici, «c'est précisément la plénitude du monde qui est la seule chose réelle [...]. Le spirituel, dans la mesure où il exerce encore un rôle, se mue en esprits [...]».¹⁴²

By 'le monde primitif' Benjamin means prehistory, man's origin, nature. What has been forgotten can be found in archaic structures, in fossils, in spirits, or in the traces these leave in later objects and need to be redeemed from the modern and the contemporary. Everything forgotten is buried into mankind's collective memory. Shadowy presences from the past materialise as one tries to remember what has been forgotten, snatching it out of its original context through the violence that is memory, appropriating and transforming it into a new reality and into new forms, through which memory suddenly comes to light and is relived differently. Benjamin quotes Franz Rosenzweig's comment above on the evocation of ancestral spirits through the power of naming, and in working towards a higher level of spirituality. This power of naming individuals and of

remembering weakens with time. Forgetting is man's destiny.

In *Franz Kafka* Benjamin constantly returns to memory and forgetting. There Benjamin brings up one of Jehovah's most profound qualities: having an infallible memory, 'jusqu'à la troisième et la quatrième, voir la centième génération'.¹⁴³ In other words, infallible memory, the incapacity to forget belong to the order of the sacred. Contrary to this forgetting is an all too human quality.

In *Voyage dans l'oubli* Parmiggiani gives his view on forgetting. There Parmiggiani links forgetting to artworks and spirit:

La vie d'un artiste est un voyage vers une œuvre et l'œuvre est un voyage dans l'oubli de la vie, semblable en cela à l'expansion lente d'un nuage dans son désir de se fondre et de s'annuler fatalement dans un autre nuage. Je ne pense pas cela comme un voyage vers un espoir, et encore bien moins vers un salut, je le pense même au contraire comme un voyage vers rien et personne, un voyage vers cette illusoire Terre promise que nous nommons l'esprit. Voyants aveugles, nous avançons dans la lumière de notre cécité chaque jour jetant des ponts sur les fleuves qui coulent.¹⁴⁴

Every artwork, text, musical composition, depicts its author's creative journey towards it. Each artist's personal, cultural, historical itinerary becomes crystallised in every new work he/she creates. These artworks – and by extension their authors – become forgotten as time goes by and more works are created and forgotten. Since an artist's fate is his/her work and the work's fate is eventual oblivion, the work of art then represents a spiritual journey and becomes the space for an artist's spirit to dwell in, as well as the trace of his burning, ephemeral existence. In this respect *Salita della Memoria* truly becomes a space for memory: dreams, departed spirits (especially of great artists), the past, as well as for forgetting. It is also the memory of the surrealist chance encounter: a street name leads to a baker's shop from which part of the artwork was manufactured. The work is not only inspired by greatness, departed souls, dreams, and a present-past; it is also formed by the banal and everyday, as well as by humble human toil (the baker), not only great artists. As a result it is a

work subject to time: literally, metaphorically, physically and metaphysically (its actual being as artwork). The work points to timelessness through its actual image of sky and stellar constellations, its use of repetition, and its celebration of memory. It also becomes a profanely illuminated space for contemplation, for reading the past, the future and the destiny of humanity from the stars.

In *Sur le pouvoir d'imitation* Benjamin writes: '«Lire ce qui n'a jamais été écrit.» Ce type de lecture est le plus ancien: la lecture avant tout langage, dans les entrailles, dans les étoiles ou dans les danses.'¹⁴⁵ Parmiggiani creates a work that is made of 'le ciel et les entrailles de l'homme' (*In Sogno*: VIII) and of the macrocosmic and microcosmic. However, 'la Terre promise' Parmiggiani talks about in *Voyage dans l'oubli* exists in his spirit, in himself, in 'les entrailles' that are also man's toil in the baked bread. This baked bread turned ladder-sculpture is placed on a blank canvas expressing the artist's imagination and creativity in suspension, both joined to 'le ciel' via (a photograph of) a sky full of starry constellations. *Salita della Memoria* narrates a fragment of man's existence suspended between earthly reality and heavenly glory or catastrophe (made up of a blank canvas, an unclimable temporary ladder, a false sky), between past origins and history as present existence. The blank canvas and its positioning at the base of a ladder leading to the stars metaphorically expresses the artist's wish for his work's immortality and ascension into posterity. *Salita della Memoria* can be read as a *memento mori* for great humanity: Dürer, Michelangelo, Kant. It can also be read as a contemporary recreation of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*; that is, an artist's vision of the End of the World, of catastrophe, of the interruption of history and of redemption.

In terms of contemporary aesthetics *Salita della Memoria* engages with Adorno's and Vattimo's ideas on contemporary art being that of self-negation, of parody, of mimicry. 'Even in the case of Adorno's negative aesthetics [...] the chief criterion for evaluating the work of art is its greater or lesser capacity for self-negation.'¹⁴⁶ This is, for one, the result of the materials used in the work

and their juxtaposition. Parody lies here in the combination of ready-made and mass made: bread, blank canvas, photograph, as well as a title suggesting a grandiose concept that in reality is borrowed from a street('s name). 'The status of the work of art becomes constitutively ambiguous: the work no longer seeks a success which would permit it to position itself within a determinate set of values (the imaginary museum of objects possessed aesthetic quality), but rather defines its success fundamentally in terms of rendering problematic such a set of values, and in overcoming – at least momentarily – the limits of the latter.'¹⁴⁷ (This quotation and the one before it both apply to all of Parmiggiani's work.) *Salita della Memoria* is a work of art, yet it carries the seeds of its own decay and disintegration as part of its being art exposed as the object of art. It also stresses its 'voyage dans l'oubli' through the materials used. The work indicates the contemporary fickleness of art-values, aesthetic taste, which form the *Zeitgeist* and popular psyche, raising this very fickleness to the status of art. In its self-negation as great art, the work takes one back to Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas on the loss of aura and tradition, on the replacement of integrated experience with the flash experience which the work exposes precisely in its portrayal of such a social condition: fickleness and the desire for quick sensations, and quick success.

For example here (as well as in other works), Parmiggiani uses ready-made materials that are based on rustic, old methods: baked bread; and modern technology: photography. Both are time-dependent in different ways. Bread decays and dissolves with time losing its initial function as food, or as fake ladder. Technology and photography develop advancing with time, and as objects damage with time. Parmiggiani also plays with the art-historical polemics of vertical and horizontal. All paintings prior to 1945 were placed vertically or horizontally across ceilings – the position for great art – versus that on the floor. On the floor works of art are a phenomenon of Post-War Art and were seen by many art-historians as a form of denigration of art; its bringing

down from a pedestal-status. The bread-ladder here becomes an allegory of time and memory. It forms a (decaying, expiring) continuity between art-historical developments, changes in aesthetic experience over a certain interval in history (going back to the Renaissance from Parmiggiani's passage) that link the past with the present, precariously. The work also forsee the future since the ladder is an allegorical link that illustrates today's relation with past-tradition: a relation in decline with dissolution as its future fate. The ladder is also a metaphorical link between man or our planet and the entire universe. *Salita della Memoria* belongs to what Bürger defines as the nonorganic work of art.¹⁴⁸ There each element can be read separately or added to others to give multiple and transformed meanings.

In *Sculpture d'Ombre*, 2002 (fig.34), Parmiggiani resumes ideas expressed in his writings and in *Salita della Memoria* such as portraying different aspects of time through ephemerality and timelessness, self-negation, memory, history, culture, violence, in the form of traces. There the walls of an entire drawing-room, except for the windows, were burnt leaving a thick smoke on them. Areas of smoke were erased to show the traces of bookshelves and stacks of books. The latter appear illuminated in parts in contrast with the surrounding dark smoke. What mentally illuminates (books) have now disappeared. Only erased traces and traces of illumination remain, indicating an absent presence. This is an indication that while memory exists culture rarely completely disappears. It maybe forgotten falling into what Parmiggiani describes as 'l'œuvre' that is 'un voyage dans l'oubli de la vie'; but there is always some trace of it left, some illumination that resurfaces through memory – especially involuntarily.

In terms of history and memory, Parmiggiani's work is a monument to all the libraries and books that have been burnt and destroyed through man's neglect, wars, colonialism, oppression, censorship, ignorance. (The Ancient Library of Alexandria is one example that springs to mind.) The book-library traces are an example of Benjaminian traces left in spaces by their inhabitants. In this sense

the work is a *memento mori* to previous, forgotten cultures, writers, readers, as well as to what lingers on from the past finding its way into the present-future. According to Adorno the trace is the idea a work gives off, the emotion a work inspires in the spectator, and is ambiguous. In *Sculpture d'Ombre* the illuminated areas are traces of culture, writing, reading; all forms of knowledge that elevate consciousness and the mental faculties. The darkness is the trace-effect of man's destruction, and the ravages of time. Both light and dark are consequences of man's positive and negative actions, and of life. *Sculpture d'Ombre* is also a *devoir de mémoire* of man's cultural existence and the experience of violence. Parmiggiani has this to say on *Sculpture d'Ombre*:

Au sujet de cette œuvre, je peux seulement parler de sa forme évidente, d'un désir, d'une intime aspiration, en ayant conscience qu'une œuvre n'est jamais un geste de bonne éducation, ni rassurant, ni optimiste, ni décoratif, mais radical, dur, un acte subversif.
C'est une œuvre qui désire le secret, le silence, et se voiler de mystère. 'Mystère', je le sais, est un mot difficile à prononcer. Presque hérétique, mais il s'agit d'une force, d'une présence enracinée dans l'essence même de l'être. Secrète, car c'est dans l'obscurité qu'il faut conduire le regard de celui qui observe. Silencieuse, car le silence est aujourd'hui une parole subversive puisqu'il est un espace méditatif.
Traces, poussière du temps, les signes les plus authentiques du passage, de la secrète et émouvante vie des choses.
Sculpture de poussière, sculpture d'ombre, sculptée par le feu et par le temps; qui naisse de ses cendres. Feu, qui est tragédie et lumière dans le regard.
Éternité de l'éphémère. Une œuvre qui aspire à l'immatériel, qui marque en utopie le dernier, extrême refuge de la pensée.¹⁴⁹

The fire that causes traces, here turned into art, Parmiggiani calls 'tragédie et lumière dans le regard'. Here Parmiggiani stresses the ambiguity that exists within elements of nature. 'Éternité de l'éphémère' is one description Parmiggiani gives this work. This apparent contradiction – the everlasting condition of what is fleeting – is what Parmiggiani constantly seeks to express in all his works and is the truth he exposes there. *Sculpture d'Ombre* is no

exception. With this Parmiggiani illustrates how artworks can be subversive, hard, radical, because they are language's silent meditation on the reality of life, on the truth and essence of our existence. *Sculpture d'Ombre* is also an image telling the story of a particular incident that repeats in time and place. The burning of culture, of memory, of history, of books, recurs throughout the history of mankind. As Parmiggiani explains, imagination made visible and creativity distilled into artworks can be threatening, since they involve at least one of the following: thinking, interpretation, awakening, criticism, revolution. The most subversive of all are those works that remain silent, speechless images that show a violent fragment of reality. They are subversive because they force the spectator to speak for them due to the power of their gaze (the aura which shines through ruins, in Benjamin's terms). Smoke, dust, traces, come to appear with the passage of time, only to disappear again with the passage of time, reappearing later or somewhere else, in a repetitive cycle reflecting the fate and violence of humanity.

In Parmiggiani's work it is not actual flesh and bone that are described, but absent presence, memory, traces of the actions of man, of creativity, of the events of history, that are eternal at every second and repeat infinitely. This is what makes the work doubly violent. Objects have disappeared and been silenced forever reappearing as a violent memorial to violence through traces. The secret of their contents remains a mystery. They are doubly powerful because of their anonymity. Whose culture, what books, when, where? All questions that cannot be answered. Every person can project his/her version and memory of historical violence onto the work. *Sculpture d'Ombre* embodies the dissolution of history.

The 'tête de mort' is a recurring motif in many paintings of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. Parmiggiani's reflection on traces of (past) culture present in contemporary life leads to the creation of *Synecdoche*, 2002 (fig.35). There Parmiggiani creates an ingenious work charged with philosophical and

temporal issues such as parody, self-negation, the joining of past and present. These elements reflect the ephemeral condition of all art. One part of the work is made up of a painting by Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), *Santa Maria l'Egiziaca* (1641), borrowed from the Musée Fabre's private collection in Montpellier. Ribera's painting shows an emaciated Saint Maria in the wilderness, semi-covered, praying in humble piety. Behind the Saint tower rocks with a narrow skyline leading to the heavens. In front of the Saint, a piece of half-eaten bread and a human skull are placed on a low rock. What lies in front of the Saint, echoing her creased flesh, are death-symbols that point to her body's eventual fate. The high rocks with the sky behind her express the ordeal of the ascension to heaven which is her soul's final abode. Themes of saints, their travails, and the ultimate heavenly rewards, as well as the futility of earthly life are common themes in Baroque art.

Opposite *Santa Maria l'Egiziaca* Parmiggiani places a skull and piece of bread on a pedestal echoing those in the painting. This is the second part of the work. All objects there are readymade. The only creativity is the imaginative intervention of the artist, his choice and arrangement of the objects, his (re)naming the *new* work. Art now becomes artistic intervention, and the philosophy of rethinking the work and its context by choosing a specific image, placing it into a contemporary context, adding objects to it that transform it and add meanings to it. It is also a way to think the past since for Parmiggiani '*memoire ne signifie pas passé mais pensée*'.¹⁵⁰ *Synecdoche* also illustrates Parmiggiani's statement in *Temps et non-temps*: 'Mettre en contact des formes lointaines, dans le temps et dans l'esprit, faire se rencontrer un temps et un autre temps, créer des courts-circuits: une autre idée du temps.'¹⁵¹

By adding objects to Ribera's painting Parmiggiani creates an art-historical dialectic of before and after, engaging with this particular work in an attempt to pay homage to it (to Ribera, to the Baroque), to make one doubly aware of it, 'to court it'. 'All attempts to court a work of art must remain futile unless its sober

historical content is illuminated by the shafts of dialectical insight,' writes Benjamin.¹⁵² Parmiggiani illuminates Ribera's work through the contrast of a before and after in order to focus attention on the work, redeem and engender meanings in the work, thus bringing it to life through its new context as contemporary art. According to Benjamin, 'a dialectical historian' believes that works of art 'incorporate both their pre-history and their after-history – an after-history in virtue of which their pre-history can be seen to undergo constant change.'¹⁵³ The main reason for this lies in the accumulation of information regarding objects and the surrounding world with time, as well as man's constantly evolving outlook and mentality. This results in an ever changing perspective on the prehistory of works, as well as their post-history due to changes in values, fashion, ideas. Consequently 'any critique of history worthy to be called dialectical [...] must renounce a calm, contemplative attitude towards its subject to become aware of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past is found precisely with this present.'¹⁵⁴ This is because 'at the origin of creation stands not purity but purification.'¹⁵⁵ One is always quoting from the past. In quoting from the past, something is wrenched from its context and purified. Quoting or borrowing motifs from the past and reinstating them in later work, consciously or unconsciously, is not a conservative process. Purification is violence. Quotation takes what it considers as the essential element/s and discards the rest; that is, it is a process of purification and destruction. Quotation is 'the only power in which hope still resides that something might survive this age – because it was wrenched from it.'¹⁵⁶ This means that the redemption of the past, integrated as quotation into the present, takes place through its extraction from that present and this can only take place through dialectical analysis, according to Benjamin. This is done by means of a contemplative violence, a destruction that results from remembrance, from memory both involuntary and voluntary, from some desperate attempt to bring to life traces left behind.

Parmiggiani does precisely this. He quotes from history in a triple sense: in a theological, in an art historical and in a temporal sense. He also stresses the need to remember the past and rethink it as present. Parmiggiani snatches Ribera's image from its time and place; that is, from its Baroque (1641), and museum context, both literally and historically, to insert it into his context of time and place: temporary 2002-exhibition space. Parmiggiani is underlining some truth about Ribera's painting. It does not only belong to the Baroque but also (more so) to the twenty-first century because it is perceived and interpreted through a twenty-first-century context. In this sense Parmiggiani problematises and questions the ambiguous notion of historical belonging. This is similar to Adorno's view on traces that are ambiguity, since traces are the ideas a work communicates; its memory, and are seen and analysed through a later context.

At the same time Parmiggiani mimicks Ribera's taking a fragment from early Christian history, quoting and putting it in a Baroque context. Parmiggiani's quotation of Ribera is a repetition since he not only quotes Ribera's entire quotation in his work, he also imitates Ribera's action. Through *Santa Maria l'Egiziaca* Ribera addresses the Christian past in his Baroque context while pointing to the future; he does so in two ways. He looks to the Baroque as a future context of early Christian history, as the development and evolution of Christianity. He also shows the real future of all life depicted by the skull that signals the destruction of history through mortality. Parmiggiani chooses to snatch from Ribera's painting a specific fragment reproducing it as the Baroque painting's contemporary double reflection. Parmiggiani uses this fragment of bread and skull, as the painting's real object-reflection and as a reflection of its fate as art. Baroque spirituality has become erased and transformed into a skull and piece of bread on a rock, a material reality implying that the fate of all art and humanity is death and decay. Parmiggiani uses real objects in the bread and skull on an iron pedestal. All are subject to time literally and metaphorically. Michelet's 'chaque époque rêve la suivante' quoted by Benjamin in *Paris, die*

Hauptstadt des XIX. Jahrhunderts is mocked by Parmiggiani showing the real future of art and fame is death. Parmiggiani uses bread and a skull similar to the one Ribera must have used (c.1641) as a model for that part of his painting, thus reversing and negating the aesthetic order; that is, by using real objects to reflect a work of art that originally served as models for Ribera's work. With this Parmiggiani is making a parody out of the idea of 'the origin of the work of art' (the title of Heidegger's essay which I discuss in *Angelo* later on.)

Vattimo's words about the 'status of the work of art' becoming 'constitutively ambiguous' because 'the work no longer seeks a success which would permit it to position itself within a determinate set of values' defining 'its success fundamentally in terms of rendering problematic such a set of values, and in overcoming – at least momentarily – the limits of the latter'¹⁵⁷ ring true in *Synecdoche*. *Synecdoche* successfully functions as an artwork only because it makes one conscious of its indeterminacy. It problematises its value as art, since one part of the work: Ribera's painting is borrowed; it is unique and priceless. The other part is perishable, reproducible, and of no significant value.

En l'espèce de la marchandise nous avons la promesse de l'immortalité, pas directement pour les hommes, et le fétiche – pour pousser loin le rapport institué à juste titre par vous [Benjamin] avec le livre sur le baroque – devient perfidement une image ultime du XIXe siècle, comme la tête de mort.¹⁵⁸

In Adorno's terms above, 'l'espèce de la marchandise' can be applied to the Ribera painting. There Ribera seeks to represent a double 'promesse de l'immortalité' through the spiritual example his painting illustrates, and his own immortality through the work that becomes Ribera's trace. Parmiggiani takes the allegorical Baroque 'tête de mort' and turns it into the work's – and by extension art's – reality thus mocking the 'promesse de l'immortalité'. Parmiggiani's second part reflects and parodies Ribera's work, as does his *Synecdoche*. The

bread and skull are a macabre reminder of what lies within the painting reflecting the objects, and the fate of the Saint. This gives a similar feeling to the traces of burnt books in *Sculpture d'Ombre*, a feeling of Ribera's absent presence; of death. Multiple death is signalled here: death of the artist, death of art and tradition, as well as the death of the work of art. The death of the work of art lies in its parody and mimicry, but most important in its self-negation, as Vattimo and Adorno underline. This self-negation takes place on the real level since one part of Parmiggiani's work will really decay and disintegrate, and on the level of meaning since without the real bread and skull-part the Ribera-part loses its contemporary meaning and returns to what it actually *was*: a painting by Jusepe Ribera called *Santa Maria l'Egiziaca* (1641). The bread and skull – symbols of life and death – become *Santa Maria l'Egiziaca*'s *mise-en-abyme*, reducing it to a fragment, the one worth redeeming from the past because it represents the only certainty or tangible reality man knows and should never forget.

Parmiggiani's fragment can only be read in juxtaposition with Ribera's painting for meaning to shine through. That is, the present meaning of art can only be illuminated in the light of a past tradition of art, and vice-versa in agreement with Benjamin. Parmiggiani's fragment is the fragment taken out of a work's totality that opposes this totality, along the lines of Adorno's thinking, because it foresees the work's eventual fragmentation and dissolution as its true reality. Through dispersion and parodic reflection Parmiggiani fragments the work to underline the illusory quality of totality. In this respect, Parmiggiani's fragment: the bread and skull on a pedestal, become the *memento mori* of Ribera's painting – and by extension of the Baroque – of tradition and the past.

Sineddoche, 1976 & 1986 (fig.36), is an earlier version of an idea similar to *Synecdoche*. Next to a painting: *Allegoria della pittura*, 1523-24, by Dosso Dossi (c.1489-1542) Parmiggiani places a canvas, a painter's stool, with paintbrush and palette. The canvas is almost blank except for three painted

butterflies. These echo the painter's painting in Dossi's canvas. Again another time; a past-epoch has been brought literally into a contemporary context in a double allegory. The actual one is represented by the painting, the other is expressed through Parmiggiani's mimickery of the artist in the painting and his butterflies. The painting's artist is dead, the painter who imitates the painting in the painting is absent. Only a canvas, stool, and paint apparatus point to his existence. *Sineddoche* becomes an allegory of an allegory in Benjamin's terms of an allegory being different to what it is as a result of Parmiggiani's intervention.¹⁵⁹

Parmiggiani depicts the theme of angels and angelic space, in a work called *Angelo*, 1995 (fig. 37). *Angelo* is a very enigmatic work. Like many of Parmiggiani's works it includes the visible and invisible. In *Angelo* the invisible is very powerfully represented as part of the work. *Angelo* is a contemporary metamorphosis of past angelic conceptions, and an acknowledgement of the importance of the angelic in agreement with Benjamin, among others.

One of Parmiggiani's many creations to make absences visual, *Angel*, nevertheless, has an enormous capacity for resounding in each of our consciences. 'The image of an angel appears in times of great cultural problems. [...] And the circling or variations of an angel's flight is also recorded at times of great change, in situations of profound cultural transition.' A creature of mediation in all cultures and in all eras, the angel, from its earliest representations in our cultural tradition dating to the 4th century B.C., originated with the winged [...] Hermes, [...] the bearer of messages, interpreter of the gods, has always, [...] been the spirit of the earth and the heavens wearing sandals of gold to transport him. [...] However, in the vast world of literature about angels which, from the Sacred Texts to Dante's *Divina Commedia* and from [...] the vibrant poetic pronouncements of Milton, Rimbaud, Kafka, Lorca, Rilke, Larrea, Neruda, Benjamin to our own days, [...] the figure of the angel is invoked in relation to a sense of falling which has already taken place or is on the verge of doing so. Likewise, in all tradition of figurative representation and images used in Western painting, from Cavallini to Signorelli to Parmiggiani, angels have always evoked a sense of suspension and elevation, but also of falling, in which they emblematically accompany

Mankind. [...]. The angel's shoes by Parmiggiani, rather than recalling Van Gogh's painting, are actually the eloquent poetic execution of an absence leading to salvation associated with the earthly tragedy of Mankind on earth. [...] If for Saint Thomas angels were 'pure intelligence', and intelligence is immaterial, the result is that they too can only be immaterial [...].¹⁶⁰

Angelo consists of a pair of old muddy shoes, each on a wooden plank, enclosed in a tall glass vitrine and placed on a pedestal – suggesting a working angel; a people's angel rather than the mythological Hermes with his golden sandals. As Bruno Corà suggests, above, the angel's shoes indicate 'an absence leading to salvation associated with the earthly tragedy of Mankind'. The tall transparent glass is the space for an invisible or absent presence. Parmiggiani's choice of materials is of course deliberate and carefully thought through. The worn out stained shoes metaphorically indicate the hard journey taken to achieve immateriality: 'pure intelligence', lightness and purity of the soul.

Parmiggiani has this to say on *Angelo*:

[...] montrer que le corps consumé et sublimé dans le bûcher de l'*Angelo*, son empreinte invisible, est la même empreinte que la flamme [...]. Flamme qui est le souffle et le même esprit brûlant dans les yeux fiévreux de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne de Ribera, le même feu qui dévore le corps de l'arbre carbonisé, tremblant, apeuré, seul, l'ultime; parcouru par la foudre qui l'a tordu jusque dans les veines du cœur.¹⁶¹

In this sense *Angelo* is a continuation of Parmiggiani's artistic voyage between *Synecdoche* and the Ribera painting to show that there is a religiosity of art that is stronger than images of religious art, that can also be felt in nature and all creatures (as in 'l'arbre carbonisé').

Parmiggiani shows this through the creation of an invisible space that becomes an illustration of pure spirit. It is the work of art itself only we cannot see it because we are not pure, we can only see what is material. In *Angelo* Parmiggiani continues with a traditional theme on angels illustrated in past

religious works: Cavallini, Signorelli. However, Parmiggiani's *Angelo* has undergone a metamorphosis. In religious works angels are, in general, depicted appearing to the Holy Virgin, to saints. Parmiggiani's *Angelo* does not appear to the contemporary spectator. Parmiggiani wants his work to be experienced as essence, as spirit. This cannot be done through seeing, but through intuition and the heart. Referring to *L'œuvre immatérielle* Parmiggiani writes:

L'œuvre à l'état pur, l'œuvre mentale et immatérielle se situe à mi-chemin entre l'œil et l'image créée. Suspendue dans ce *no man's land*, c'est là que se matérialise l'essence profonde de l'œuvre, c'est là qu'a lieu ce que l'on pourrait appeler une divine métamorphose.¹⁶²

In other words, the visible depiction of a religious subject is not what constitutes an artwork's spirituality, and possesses the power to inspire religious fervour, faith, piety, humility. The religious dimension lies somewhere between the work and its spectator: it is mysterious, irrational, and invisible. It can only be intuited by the beholder's feelings and remains impossible to define. Corà quotes José Jimenez's linking angels' flights to times of profound changes and cultural transitions, as well as indicating that the angel is synonymous to falling in modern times. Here the shoes belong to an invisible, flying *Angelo* whose body is 'consumé et sublimé' (Parmiggiani's words above). They become an allegory pointing to a profound cultural transition: that of a non-conventional spirituality in art, the raising of consciousness the fact that aesthetic experience has now changed, that traditional representation is no longer valid.

In fact these shoes are a homage to Vincent Van Gogh, one of the major artists responsible for the cultural transition that started taking place in art towards the end of the nineteenth century through his paintings that stressed the canvas's flat surface, using quick short brushstrokes and colour in a way that completely revolutionised the concept of painting. Contrary to Corà's statement above, the shoes do recall and form a dialogue with another pair of shoes: those

repeatedly painted by Van Gogh and further immortalised in Martin Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art*, (1935-36), as the emblem of toil that comes out of the earth.¹⁶³

J'aurais aimé que tu sois à côté de moi sous cette voûte [...]. Ciel fait d'âme et de néant; ce rien qui s'envole de l'*Angelo*, qui consume dans le regard son évanescence, qui flotte, corps sans souffle, air, bûcher, fumée, flamme, boue, esprit venu du sang d'un autre frère: Vincent.¹⁶⁴

Parmiggiani's naming 'Vincent' is an open reference and homage to Van Gogh. (Profoundly religious, Van Gogh initially wanted to become a preacher, failed to do so and became a painter.) In this sense *Angelo* embodies the spirituality of art, the spirit of the author-artist and of all artists, in particular of those departed, as well as becoming a monument to the spirit of Van Gogh.

Parmiggiani uses glass to protect his *Angelo*. Glass encloses the shoes, a material upon which it is almost impossible to leave traces. Its transparency signals purity. However, glass itself can become trace through shattering, burning or destruction. Life and death do not touch (intact) glass, only light, illumination can shine through it. In *Expérience et pauvreté* Benjamin has this to say on glass:

Scheerbart, pour en revenir à lui, accorde la plus grande importance à installer ses personnages – et, sur leur modèle, ses concitoyens – dans des logements dignes de leur rang: dans des maisons de verre mobiles, telles que Loos et le Corbusier les ont entre-temps réalisées. Le verre, ce n'est pas un hasard, est un matériau dur et lisse sur lequel rien n'a prise. Un matériau froid et sombre, également. Les objets de verre n'ont pas d'«aura». Le verre, [...] est l'ennemi du mystère. Il est aussi l'ennemi de la propriété. Le grand écrivain André Gide a dit un jour: chaque objet que je veux posséder me devient opaque. Si des gens comme Scheerbart rêvent de constructions en verre, serait-ce parce que ils sont les apôtres d'une nouvelle pauvreté?¹⁶⁵

Parmiggiani's glass case becomes an appropriate dwelling for angels, 'dignes de

leur rang'. Benjamin's description of glass as smooth, resilient, enemy of mystery, devoid of aura, a material denoting poverty is thought provoking. Glass acquires an aura from what illuminates it, without illumination it is sombre, poor and without an aura. By using glass Parmiggiani underlines the need for illumination, for light, that of course comes with knowledge and spirituality. Without light one cannot see, let alone read, learn and contemplate the world around one. At the same time by using glass Parmiggiani underlines man's inability to see light itself; that is, spirit. Glass may not be mysterious but it can through a suggestion of what is invisible become mysterious. Placing these worn (seemingly) empty shoes in glass gives them a fragile protection, while drawing attention to them. Why protect shoes that could easily be discarded; why protect the old and worn out? The answer has to be of the order of memory, of the spiritual, not only as piety and *caritas* but also as humility and a remembering of man's origin.

In *Angelo* Parmiggiani creates a profoundly moving work urging the spectator to sense what cannot be seen by human eyes. By using worn out shoes in an artwork that suggests spirituality, *Angelo*, Parmiggiani is highlighting the value of what is humble, of objects and persons one ignores or simply does not see because of an increasing loss of feeling for humanity and human values. Parmiggiani stresses mankind's dire need for angels and salvation except that for Parmiggiani this lies within ourselves. Mankind needs illuminating from within: as 'Kafka remarked in his *Diaries* that our era identified an absence, a void, in the image of an angel.'¹⁶⁶

In many ways Parmiggiani's *Angelo* finds correspondences with Benjamin's enigmatic passage inspired by Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin's passage is also about a woman he loved, mixing her image with that of the Angel that prophesies man's destiny:

Mais l'ange ressemble à tout ce dont j'ai dû me séparer: aux êtres et particulièrement aux choses. Il loge dans les choses que je n'ai plus. Il les

rend transparent et derrière chacune d'elles m'apparaît celui à qui elles sont destinées. C'est pourquoi personne ne peut me surpasser pour ce qui est d'offrir. En fait, l'ange était peut-être attiré par quelqu'un qui offre et part les mains vides. Car lui-même, qui a des serres et des ailes effilées, voire tranchantes comme un couteau, ne fait pas non plus mine de se précipiter sur celui qu'<il> a aperçu de loin. Il le regarde fixement dans les yeux – longtemps, puis recule par à-coups, mais inexorablement. Pourquoi? Pour l'entraîner avec soi sur ce chemin vers le futur par lequel il est venu et qu'il connaît si bien qu'il le parcourt sans se retourner ni quitter du regard celui qu'il a élu. Il veut le bonheur: le conflit qui oppose l'extase de l'une seule fois, du nouveau, du non encore vécu et la béatitude de l'encore une fois, de la possession retrouvée, du vécu. C'est pourquoi il ne peut espérer du nouveau sur aucun autre chemin que celui du retour, s'il emmène avec lui un nouvel être humain. De même, à peine t'avais-je vu pour la première fois que je retournai avec toi d'où je venais. *Ibiza, 13 août 1933.*¹⁶⁷

Benjamin's Angel signals parting and departure, as well as a repeated beginning. He remains torn between what is new and not yet experienced, and the lived experience of a once again. He persists in objects Benjamin gave to those dear to him as traces of love, as timeless memory. The Angel is attracted to man's (Benjamin's) magnanimity fixing him with his gaze. Yet the Angel maintains his distance to draw man to him, to accompany him through his destiny, on a voyage that is a repetition of history, or its dissolution. In the light of Benjamin's passage, the worn-out stained shoes in Parmiggiani's *Angelo* become the symbol of man's journey through life, the glass symbolises man's dwelling in the realm of eternal light; of knowledge, of redeemed history. The Angel is the link between man's earthly fate and his ascension into the hereafter. This in Parmiggiani's sense is the divine within ourselves; it lies in man's 'entrailles'. Yet Benjamin's Angel has to return again and again for others accompanying them endlessly on similar new journeys. In this respect Parmiggiani's shoes and glass are monuments left behind awaiting the Angel's return. According to Parmiggiani they await mankind's awakening to the angelic within themselves.

In this third part I have analysed a selection of Parmiggiani's visual work relating this to his writings, as well as to Benjamin's ideas on the Angel of History, Kafka, the trace, memory and forgetting. As I have shown these issues occupy the work of both the artist and the philosopher. Parmiggiani's angel lies within oneself. When this angel materialises to the outside he remains invisible, immaterial, spirit, and can only be imagined. Benjamin's Angel of History (inspired by Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*) has a heavier presence, he is a violent Angel 'who preferred to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy by giving to them, to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction'.¹⁶⁸ Benjamin's Angel announces and prophesies: history as catastrophe, tempests blowing from paradise, ruins with the progress of time. Parmiggiani's angel does not make prophecies, he moves between the sky and man's 'entrailles'. Within man this angel struggles with man forcing him to acknowledge the divine within himself. When this angel flies he reminds one of those departed and those who have left traces of art and beauty behind, of what is humble, and of the need for the angelic. Parmiggiani's work is full of traces due to time, memory, absent-presences. According to Parmiggiani, every work of man is the trace of his existence on earth, therefore every work of art is the trace of the artist. At the same time Parmiggiani fills his work with Benjaminian traces.

For Benjamin traces are fragments of the past violently snatched from their original past context and quoted within some alien later context, some post-history. For this reason Benjamin's traces turn each work of art, each manmade object into a dialectical image. This dialectical image is at a standstill. The works, objects, are dialectical images because they contain past traces at a later time, seen as part of a later object; seen as post-history although they represent a prehistory. These traces together with new ones stop and are frozen in their new form that is the work or object. The discovery, recovery, redemption of past traces from works and objects are dynamic, continuous, accumulative as time

passes. This transforms works and objects into ambiguous, often allegorical, spaces; they are one thing but often denote others.

Parmiggiani picks up this dialectical image-ambiguity with its traces and creates works that expose this Benjaminian concept as its reflection. Parmiggiani takes dialectical images at a standstill and turns them into dynamic meaning through the addition of new traces (his own) that are in decline, and fading (the real bread and skull, the painter's palette, semi-painted canvas, stool in figs.35 & 36). These will soon become memory and remain as an idea, as thinking. *Synecdoche*, 2003, nor *Sineddoche*, 1985, no longer exist. Parmiggiani has created *Synecdoche* and *Sineddoche* as his traces, stressing their future erasure. And Parmiggiani does erase his own traces there. Only images of *Synecdoche* and *Sineddoche* exist, as memory which is also *memento mori*.

In this respect Parmiggiani is forcibly underlining what happens to a work when someone looks at it: it becomes seen from their contemporary perspective. With this point Parmiggiani puts forward a violent truth: past works are only temporarily seen in any context (here: 1985-, 2002-contexts), since time passes and given contexts disappear – only traces and memory remain. In this sense Parmiggiani uses Benjaminian traces to express Adorno's traces. Traces for Adorno do not form part of the dialectical image. Traces are the ideas, memories given off by the dialectical image as artwork or manmade object. These traces are the ambiguity – not the dialectical image as Benjamin claims – since as one looks at them from a later perspective the meanings they engender are already in decline. Parmiggiani's work comes to represent Adorno's ideas on art being a form of self-negation and parody with dissonance as its expression, along with Vattimo's ideas on the decline in art.¹⁶⁹ In these two works, he also expresses Adorno's statement in *Minima Moralia* on the redemption of knowledge since these works represent a 'consummate negativity' that 'delineates the mirror-image of its opposite' showing their survival and hence the redemption of knowledge to be 'the utterly impossible thing', (p.188). At the same time,

Parmiggiani stresses his credo that each work of art is a voyage towards forgetting: 'La vie d'un artiste est un voyage vers une œuvre et l'œuvre est un voyage dans l'oubli.'¹⁷⁰ In his work, Parmiggiani connects time, traces (the artist's, Benjamin, Adorno), memory, forgetting, to one another.

The very violence in Parmiggiani's visual work often lies in its impact on the senses, its questioning of traditional ways of perceiving, hearing, analysing, reading. (See *Che Cos'è la tradizione*, 1997, *What Tradition Is*, fig. 38.) Parmiggiani forces the spectator to stop, stare, and question driving him/her to either to walk away perplexed or raising his/her consciousness about the meaning of time, of memory, of existence. In many ways Parmiggiani's statement that memory is not the past; memory is thinking reflects most of his artistic project.

Conclusion & Parmiggiani's *Angelo* Revisited

I started this chapter with a discussion of Benjamin's and Adorno's ideas relevant to my chosen works of art in this chapter. I then went on to analyse artworks through these ideas. I explained that the untruth in an artwork stems from its fiction, from the artist's narrative poured into his/her work. The truth, however, stems from the materials used in the work and its structure. This truth describes a social, historical, collective condition. An important figure in artworks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the female figure as one representation of the truth about changing and current social conditions. For this reason I looked at examples of female representations in E.T.A Hoffmann's work, adapted into Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, as well as in Dix's prostitute paintings, and Bellmer's dolls. Through my analysis I concluded that these *corps-femmes* are all images of social criticism by their authors; they

describe an experience of violence due to social conditions and the slow destruction of tradition through modern progress.

In *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* all four female figures promise love and happiness only to demonstrate their incapacity in fulfilling either. Olympia is an automaton, Giulietta is a deceitful courtesan, Antonia is a singing corpse, and Stella is a false incarnation of all three. Like them, Stella has a pact with the evil Lindorf. Not only are these *corps-femmes* incapable of true feeling; they are touched by what is unhealthy and evil – embodied in Lindorf. The advent of modernity, of machines, of reification, the supremacy of profit over the spirit and humanity are all elements Lindorf's evil presence signals and signifies, and filter through *Les Contes d'Hoffmann's* *corps-femmes*. This was Hoffmann's way of describing the socio-political situation he found to be reprehensible and unbearable in his native Germany. In this respect his female figures – taken up by Offenbach in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* – become artistic expressions of an experience of violence German society was facing.

In Dix's case, his paintings show *corps-femmes* that are dehumanised, decadent, and hardened. These *corps-femmes* flaunt their degradation as a matter of fact. This again becomes Dix's way of using the female figure to portray a social truth, a reality of what was going on in big modern cities such as Berlin in the 1920s and 30s. Through his *corps-femmes* Dix shows the human alienation, the loss of warmth and spirituality, the cold and calculating indifference that reigned in progressive society. Money and how to gain it were the main preoccupations, those that could not pay were trampled underfoot. Advanced society had no use for them. Dix's representation of femininity is another expression of the experience of violence.

Another case of *corps-femmes* that I looked at were Bellmer's dolls. In Bellmer, the experience of violence is brought to the fore through the deformations, dismembering, and fragmentation of his dolls. Whereas Hoffmann-Offenbach's *corps-femmes* are beautiful to look at, capable of giving

illusions of happiness, even though beneath their glamour they are unfeeling and touched by (the) evil (in society), Bellmer's dolls are a visual shock to the senses. The experience of violence is written all over them, they represent a truth about the victimisation of the weak and defenceless in a society ruled by the oppressive and powerful. Bellmer's dolls also express the isolation, utter loneliness, and helplessness that society imposes upon those who are marginalized, deformed, and those who do not fit in. Bellmer's dolls speak of their double experience of violence. One committed by fate towards them, the other by society. But they also depict Vattimo's the decline of art.¹⁷¹ There the death of art as an event is announced and forever postponed.¹⁷²

The death of art – Hegel's term – according to Vattimo means two things. In its strong sense it describes the end of an art that is separate and confined to certain spaces (museum, galleries, concert halls, theatre). The death of art means that art has now become part of living experience; it is an art that inserts and integrates itself within the social sphere. In its weaker sense the death of art implies its extension to encompass mass-media which also becomes art.¹⁷³ Bellmer's work cannot be strictly seen as a death of art but as a decline of art where his dolls are concerned, since these still belong to exhibition spaces; they are not actually integrated into living experience. They are still art-objects and apart. At the same time, Bellmer does use photography as art, sometimes. But its use is limited and is still part of exhibition spaces. Also the subjects he portrays there: mainly his dolls are not part of what one can call mass-produced objects.

This is not the case with Parmiggiani's work. There one experience of violence is the death of art in Vattimo's two senses. The works I describe in this chapter are some examples of Parmiggiani's use of readymade; of elements that constitute man's living experience: smoke, bread, ladders, photography, museum paintings, shoes, empty glass, etc. There the work of art is part of the spectator's real experience, in some cases part of the everyday. Often, the border between the spectator and the artwork is not at all defined,

since he/she can walk into it (*Sculpture d'Ombre, La Grande Pietra*), or in between it (*Synecdoche, Sineddoche*). One can also get and use a copy of part of the artwork. For example, one can get a kitchen knife, grand piano, or Elmiro Zolla's book of the same title in *Che cos'è la tradizione*. In addition, several of the readymades Parmiggiani uses in his work are mass-produced, or part of the mass media.

Apart from the death of art – not just its decline – there are other experiences of violence in Parmiggiani. One such experience is illustrated by looking at Benjamin's Angel of History as a contrast. Benjamin's Angel describes the truth about history, explaining it as an accumulation of events spiralling towards one big catastrophe. The only hope for some salvation from catastrophe is to look at the past and try to redeem valuable remnants from it through remembering. The figure of the angel finds its way into Parmiggiani's poetry and art. It is similar to Benjamin's Angel, yet different. Parmiggiani's angel forces one to look into oneself, to discover the divine within oneself through the acts of creating and living. One experience of violence in Parmiggiani's work lies in precisely this act of looking within oneself and creating works that he considers subversive acts. In these respects his angel bears a similarity to Benjamin's. The difference lies, however, in each angel's relation to history; to time. Benjamin's Angel of History has undergone a metamorphosis in Parmiggiani's angel because history is no longer seen as an accumulation of a chain of events into one big catastrophe, history is now in the present. There is no history as such. Mozart and Goethe exist simultaneously along with Parmiggiani, as do Ribera and Dossi.¹⁷⁴ (See figs.35 & 36).

Parmiggiani's dissolution of the sense of history; that is, of chronological time in his work is another form of violence. This dissolution is connected yet again to other forms of dissolution; of violence, such as the dissolution of the artwork that is synonymous with the dissolution of man's presence and his relation to history. The smoke-traces in *Sculpture d'Ombre* will disappear, the

bread-ladder in *Salita della Memoria* will decay, *Synecdoche* and *Sineddoche* no longer exist. I also (barely) mentioned Heidegger's essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* in connection to Van Gogh's shoes in *Angelo*. I would like to briefly discuss this in relation to *Angelo*. The ideas from this analysis are common to Parmiggiani's works discussed here, as well as to most of his visual work and serve as a conclusion that shows the difference between his works and works by Dix, Bellmer – not to speak of Hoffmann-Offenbach – all of which maintain some relation to history, even though it is in decline and alienated.

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger states that works of art strive for 'the setting up of a world and the setting forth of earth' and that these 'are two essential features in the work-being of the work. [...]. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated'.¹⁷⁵ In *Morte o tramonto dell arte* Vattimo explains this as: 'the work of art is an exhibition of a world ('esposizione di un mondo'), and produces the earth ('produzione della terra')'.¹⁷⁶ There Vattimo explains that Heidegger's exhibition of a world means that the work of art has the function of founding and constructing issues that define a historical world based upon ideas of truth and untruth. In other words, a work of art reveals truths about a society, and an epoch. In this sense it becomes the site for exposing the truth about, as well as of a strong belonging to a certain social group. At the same time Heidegger's production of the earth ('the setting forth of earth'), according to Vattimo, implies that every new interpretation the work as material object produces, returns to this earth (the '*physis*' of the object), thus suggesting other new readings. Every new reading exhibits ('sets up') new possible worlds. Earth, '*physis*' is what ages, in the sense of the living, but also what is temporary because as it ages it also shows signs of damage and degradation as physical object.¹⁷⁷ (It becomes in need of restoration.) The work of art is the only product that ages positively because this aging or temporality opens up new meanings.¹⁷⁸ It is this aspect of the work of art as the exhibition of a world producing the earth, that Vattimo considers

extremely pertinent in any discourse on contemporary art because it is what denounces the temporality and the disintegration, or dissolution of the work of art.¹⁷⁹

Of all the works I discussed by Parmiggiani here, *Angelo* problematises Heidegger's (and Vattimo's) issues of world as exposed truth and earth-production; of aging and meaning there (including Benjamin's history as catastrophe), while dissolving them completely. Part of this work is made up of worn-out shoes exhibited in a glass-vitrine. The other part; the main part of *Angelo*: the angel is invisible. To begin with the presence of the angel is evoked by the power of naming; by language, by the title. This connects with Benjamin's ideas on language as revelation through naming. *Angelo* via Benjamin's ideas becomes a symbol (not an allegory; different to what it is), since it evokes in name only and not in image, and this evocation is immediate. *Angelo*(’s angel) can be seen as a symbol for the power of the invisible, for the power of absence, for the Biblical and for spirituality. *Angelo*(’s angel) also embodies the metamorphosis of angelic forms visually as art in a literal sense, and in an art historical sense. This engendering of meanings is the angel's only aging process since it has no ‘*physis*’, no materiality; it does not produce the earth. In other words, aging is not possible through this work of art since the invisible cannot age (at least not visibly). This is possible only through language, and because of it. However, engendering meanings through language produces a process of memory-associations which indicate age in the reader-spectator not in the work; that is, spirituality does not age, nor change – it has no *physis*.

However, the earth *Angelo* sets forth or produces exists and is literally depicted in the worn out shoes. These can be seen as a post-history for Van Gogh's shoe-paintings, but also as a *clin d'œil* towards Heidegger's idea of an artwork as a ‘setting forth of earth’. Everytime one looks at this ‘setting forth of earth’ in *Angelo* one realises that it produces the exhibition of the same world; a

world that has disappeared, that is invisible. *Angelo*'s shoes also engender another meaning; a homage to, or a memorial for Van Gogh('s spirit). At the same time, Parmiggiani's *Angelo* is based upon everyday objects. Therefore, it is reproducible and can be easily dismantled. It raises the question: if the work is reproduced by someone else or later, can it still be seen as one of the following (or all three): Van Gogh's spirit; in relation to Benjamin's Angel of History; a setting up of a world? Also, if it is dismantled *Angelo* disappears only his fragments would exist as other (mundane) objects. In a strong sense, *Angelo* exhibits a world made up of two separate entities: toil, and the lack of spirituality which is synonymous to forgetting. This is the truth the work doubly exposes. Once through its soiled shoes and empty vitrine (both expose absence), while exhibiting these as the truth about a lack of spirituality and of *caritas* which is why the shoes denoting hardship and poverty exist. The second through its name as a reminder of the angel which seems to have fled and is much needed by mankind. Yet this work, like the world it exhibits and the earth it produces, is held together by a material that is delicate, easily shattered, does not age (visibly), nor engenders any meaning. Thus *Angelo* exposes the truth about the dissolution of the foundations of the world it exhibits. Man's place in this world is through objects, he is anonymous in general, and what holds his spirit is easily broken. *Angelo* depicts an extremely intense experience of violence because it speaks of poverty that comes with materiality, of death (of art, of Van Gogh, of the spirit, of tradition); it exposes a sad state of humanity.

Bellmer's dolls were fragmented and distorted in body, their world was sinister and menacing. Yet somehow, the dolls were defined as objects with broken identities in a world that had certain qualities. Whereas the subject has disappeared in Parmiggiani's art, even his own trace as the artist is eventually erased because most of his art is ephemeral and in dissolution. Parmiggiani's art depicts fragments chosen from a world rich in history, in objects, in memory. These fragments are then put together to form a parallel world; the subject's

world which also defines his/her place there through memory. Yet memory means forgetting, and Parmiggiani's works are made up of fragments and traces of existence that are in dissolution. They exhibit a world whose only truth is the condition of ephemerality; of what is fleeting. Therefore, the subject's place in this world, his/her relation to the world, to history cannot be defined.

These interpretations of Parmiggiani's work show a multiple experience of violence. In addition to the dissolution of man's existence and the death of art, his work includes violence that forces thinking and memory, that shocks perception into a new way of perceiving, that attempts to force man into poetry. His works show that violence lies outside the individual, but it also lies within the individual. It lies in the inability to see the invisible that is there. It lies in the inability to intuit history as the present, and fleeting. It lies in the incapacity to appreciate what is hidden and unobvious. It lies in the refusal to believe in the divine within man and always look elsewhere for something that might not exist. Parmiggiani's work illustrates the violence coming out of 'l'expérience intérieure' as *expérience intérieure* communicated to the outside.¹⁸⁰ It also seeks to express the violence that comes with a certain beauty whose very essence overpowers man yet cannot be explained or grasped by man. This beauty induces 'l'expérience intérieure'; a profound and uncontrollable inner experience that comes from the angelic on the outside that is mysterious and a metaphor for the revelation of man's capacity to feel intensely what he cannot fathom, and is so eloquently expressed by Rainer Maria Rilke in the *Duino Elegies*:

Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic
orders? And even if one of them suddenly
pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the strength of his
stronger existence. For Beauty is nothing
but the beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear,
and why we adore it so is because it serenely
disdains to destroy us. Every angel is terrible.
And so I repress myself, and swallow the call-note
of depth-dark sobbing.¹⁸¹

Notes

1. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. from German by Robert Hullot-Kentor, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p.9. Original Title: *Ästhetische Theorie*.
2. Ibid., p.9.
3. Ibid., p.262.
4. Ibid., p.9.
5. Ibid., p.15.
6. Ibid., p.15.
7. Ibid., p.138.
8. Ibid., p.182.
9. Walter Benjamin, *L'Œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique*, 1939, in *Œuvres III*, trad. de l'allemand par Maurice de Gandillac, Rainer Rochlitz et Pierre Rusch (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), pp.282-285. Original Title: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*.
10. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. from German by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp.70-72.
11. Ibid., p.69.
12. Eva Guelen, *Under Construction. Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"*, in *Benjamin's Ghosts*, ed. by Gerhard Richter (Stanford; California: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp.123-24.
13. For example see Theodor Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno ↔ Benjamin 1928-1940*, trad. de l'allemand par Philippe Invernél (Paris: La Fabrique editions, 2002), p. 188. Also see Theodor W. Adorno, *Sur Benjamin*, trad. de l'allemand par Christophe David (Paris: Allia, 1999). Original Title: *Über Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970).
14. Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption* (California: California University Press, 1994), p.210.
15. Quoted in Wolin, *ibid.*, p.207.
16. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque* in *La folie du voir. Une esthétique du virtuel*, (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p.62.
17. Chapter title, in *ibid.*, pp.13-63.
18. Ibid., p.67.
19. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp.183-84.
20. Quoted in Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, 1935, in *Œuvres III*, p.46.
21. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.122.
22. Ibid., p.120.
23. Ibid., p.179.
24. Ibid., p.181.
25. Benjamin, *Sur le concept de l'histoire*, in *Œuvres III*, p.441. Original Title: *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1942), posthumous.
26. Ibid., p.439.
27. Ibid., p.439.
28. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 1951, trans. from German by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1999), p.247.
29. Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, p.47.
30. Ibid., p.47.
31. Ibid., pp.57-58.
32. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. from German by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.463.
33. Buci-Glucksmann, *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque*, p.20.
34. Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, p.60.

35. In chapter two, *Hans Bellmer: Writing the Perverse Body* I discussed how fetishes started as sacred ethnological objects and ended as perverse sexual objects. This is how one form of the past becomes renewed: through meaning. At the same time the past persists in the object in its original meaning; as an origin.
36. Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, p. 61.
37. Ibid., p.66.
38. Ibid., p.66.
39. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.460.
40. Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno↔Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.156.
41. Ibid., pp.157-58.
42. Ibid., pp.158-59.
43. Ibid., pp.159-60.
44. Ibid., pp.161.
45. Ibid., p.164.
46. Ibid., p.168.
47. Jürgen Habermas quoted in Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, p.29.
48. Ibid., p.29.
49. Ibid., p.29.
50. Buci-Glucksmann, *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque*, p.57.
51. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne, introd. by George Steiner (London: Verso, 1998), pp.164-65. Original Title: *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, 1926. Benjamin's quotations are from Friedrich Creuzer, *Symbolik und Mythologie den alter Volker, besonders der Griechen*, I. Theil.2., völlig umgearb. (Leibzig, Darmstadt: Ausg., 1819).
52. Ibid., p.165.
53. Temporal mode associated with the allegory. Ibid., p.165.
54. Ibid., p.165.
55. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.458.
56. Adorno, *Correspondance. Adorno↔Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.164. Adorno agrees on this in his letter to Benjamin.
57. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, p.67.
58. Benjamin, *E.T.A Hoffmann und Oskar Panizza*, in *Aufsätze. Essays. Vorträge, Gesammelte Schriften* II.2, Herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp.641-644.
59. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, p.69.
60. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p.176.
61. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, pp.52-53.
62. Benjamin, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. from German by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979), p.112.
63. Ibid., p.112.
64. Ibid., p.115.
65. Ibid., pp.113-14.
66. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.45.
67. Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno↔Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.185.
68. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, p.93.
69. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.110.
70. Ibid., p.157.
71. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, pp.234-35.
72. Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, p.57.
73. Adorno in *Correspondance. Adorno↔Benjamin*, p.168.
74. Benjamin, *Sur quelques thèmes baudelairiens*, 1939, in *Charles Baudelaire. Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme* (Paris: Payot, 1979), pp.189-90.

75. Ibid., p.188.
76. Ibid., p.188.
77. Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondances*, quoted in Benjamin, *ibid.*, p.189.
78. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.462.
79. In *The Culture of Redemption*, Leo Bersani sees Benjamin's analysis of Baudelaire's poem as *ad hoc* and Benjamin's historical methods as philosophical license to put forward his ideology of redemption. 'In a sense, this "redeems" all factitious oppositions between past and present in Benjamin, for he really acknowledges no responsibility to historical truth in spite of his announced "immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter." Not only is history devalued as a referent; the historical method itself is nothing more than a principal tactic within a strategy designed to rescue truth from history [...]. From this perspective, Benjamin can get away with almost anything, from misreading a single poem to the most sweeping statements about modern man's being "cheated out of his experience". [...] He reads Baudelaire's sonnet "Correspondances" as if it were saying the same thing as "La Vie antérieure." [...] Benjamin says almost nothing about either poem. [...] his essays never include sustained discussions of the literary works they refer to – but as far as I can make out, he reads "Correspondances" as describing "data of remembrance – not historical data, but data of prehistory," which we have lost. Yet Baudelaire does not say that nature was once a "living temple" of veiled symbols, but that it is that temple. [...] nothing in the poem describes correspondences as those "data of remembrance" connecting us to "prehistory," which establish an "encounter with an earlier life." [...] Benjamin's tendentiousness often takes the form of an insistent blindness, and if all of human history is ultimately expendable, there is no reason to expect a particular poem to escape the teleological bias of his thought. What is important is to detect how or where fallen art can be redeemed, and in order to do this Benjamin invents the terms in which art presumably mourns what it has lost.' Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp.55-56.
80. Wolin, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetic of Redemption*, p.235.
81. Benjamin, *Sur quelques thèmes baudelairiens*, p.191.
82. *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* Opera Booklet (Hamburg, Deutsche Grammophon, 1989) Synopsis by Charles Lamb, p.39. There are two versions of the opera with some differences, but this is not relevant here.
83. Ibid., p.43.
84. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, in Charles Baudelaire. *Un poète lyrique à l'apogée du capitalisme*, p.222.
85. Ibid., p.232.
86. Ibid., p.222.
87. Benjamin, *Sur quelques thèmes Baudelairiens*, pp.169-70.
88. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 1996), p.210.
89. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.415.
90. Ibid., p.412.
91. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p.208.
92. Ibid., p.208.
93. Ibid., p.210.
94. Ibid., p.215.
95. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, p.227.
96. Sue Taylor, *Hans Bellmer. The Anatomy of Anxiety* (Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), p.13.
97. 'Darum ist Offenbachs romantische Oper im neunzehnten Jahrhundert eine der wenigen mit modernem Sujet.' Adorno, *Hoffmanns Erzählungen in Offenbachs Motiven*, in *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge. Gesammelte Schriften II-2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), p.43.
98. Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno ↔ Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.184.
99. Ibid., p.184.

100. Ibid., pp.158-59.
101. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 1925-26, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, pp.58-9.
Original Title: *Einbahnstraße*.
102. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, p.225.
103. Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix. 1891-1969. Sa vie, son œuvre* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen, 1989), p.151.
104. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, p.248.
105. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.161.
106. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, p.225.
107. Ibid., p.223.
108. Ibid., p.228.
109. 'Pupperln heissen in Wien die Dirnen', Adorno, *Hoffmanns Erzählungen in Offenbachs Motiven*, p.43.
110. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.45.
111. Ibid., p.138.
112. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p.461.
113. Benjamin, *Zentralpark. Fragments sur Baudelaire*, p. 228.
114. Therese Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer* (California: University of California Press), p. 54.
115. Ibid., p.229.
116. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p.161.
117. Catherine Grenier, *Claudio Parmiggiani, a Contemplative Violence*, in *Parmiggiani* (Milano: Silvana Editoriale, 2003), p.144.
118. Benjamin, *Kitsch onirique*, in *Œuvres II*, p.10.
119. Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle*, p.57.
120. Claudio Parmiggiani, *Comme des aveugles*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, édition bilingue, texte français établi par Anne et Michel Bresson-Lucas (Arles: Actes Sud, 2003), p.197.
121. Parmiggiani, *La voix de l'image*, in *ibid.*, p.33.
122. Parmiggiani, *In Sogno: VIII*, in *ibid.*, p.71.
123. Buci-Glucksmann, *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque*, p.62.
124. Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, p.289.
125. Parmiggiani, *Spirituel*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.205.
126. Parmiggiani, *Le Feu*, in *ibid.*, p.31. Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was an Italian philosopher and scientist. Bruno became a Dominican friar but was made to leave because he was too unorthodox. Bruno travelled widely. His strong support for Copernicus aroused the wrath of the inquisition. Bruno was arrested and tried for seven years then burnt at the stake in Rome.
127. Buci-Glucksmann, *Walter Benjamin et la raison baroque*, p.62.
128. Benjamin, *Le Surréalisme*, in *Œuvres II*, p.131.
129. Benjamin, *Franz Kafka*, in *Œuvres II*, p.452.
130. Ibid., pp.450-52.
131. Parmiggiani, *Temps et non-temps*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.119.
132. Benjamin, *Sur le concept de l'histoire*, p.343.
133. Ibid., pp.343-345.
134. Ibid., p.340.
135. Catherine Grenier quotes Parmiggiani in *Parmiggiani, a Contemplative Violence*, in *Parmiggiani*, p.149.
136. Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p.37.
137. Illumination and obscurity is a duality; a contradiction – rather than a dialectical image in Benjamin's sense – because they do not produce a synthesis, since illumination cancels obscurity. In Adorno's sense there is a dialectic produced by the traces (sensation-effect) of each one which must come from its opposite. This will become clear when I discuss Parmiggiani's *Sculpture d'Ombre*.

138. Parmiggiani, *Le texte du temps*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, pp.236-27.
139. Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno↔Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.156.
140. Benjamin, *L'Image proustienne*, in *Œuvres II*, p.136.
141. Parmiggiani, p.176.
142. Benjamin, *Franz Kafka*, pp.441-42. The quotation in brackets is from Franz Rosenzweig, *L'Étoile de la redemption*, trad. A. Derczanski et J.-L. Schlegel (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p.92.
143. Ibid., pp. 441.
144. Parmiggiani, *Voyage dans l'oubli*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.243.
145. Benjamin, *Sur le pouvoir de l'imitation*, in *Œuvres II*, p.363.
146. Gianni Vattimo, *The Death or Decline of Art*, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), p.190.
147. Ibid., p.188.
148. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.70-72.
149. Sylvain Amic, *Claudio Parmiggiani* (Montpellier: Actes Sud, 2003), p.28.
150. Parmiggiani, *Temps et non-temps*, p.119.
151. Ibid., p.119.
152. Benjamin, *Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian*, in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, p.353.
153. Ibid., p.351.
154. Ibid., p.351.
155. Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, pp.287-89.
156. Ibid., p.287.
157. Vattimo, *The Death or Decline of Art*, pp.188-90.
158. Adorno, *Correspondances. Adorno↔Benjamin*, p.161.
159. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp.164-65.
160. Bruno Corà quoted in Parmiggiani, pp.100-101.
161. Parmiggiani, *Une lettre*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.297.
162. Ibid., p.185.
163. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, pp. 80-101.
164. Parmiggiani, *Une lettre*, p.301.
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168. Benjamin, *Karl Kraus*, p.289.
169. Vattimo, *The Death or Decline of Art*, pp.188-90.
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171. Vattimo, *Morte o tramonto dell arte*, in *La fine della modernità*, p. 64.
172. Ibid., p.67.
173. Ibid., p.64.
174. Parmiggiani, *Temps et non-temps*, p.119.
175. Heidegger, *The Origin of The Work of Art*, p.92.
176. Vattimo, *Morte o tramonto dell arte*, p. 69. My translation.
177. Ibid., pp. 69-72.
178. Ibid., p.72.
179. Ibid., p.72.
180. Title of Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure*, 1943, in *La Somme athéologique, I*, in *Œuvres Complètes V* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).
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I consider Bloch's question: 'when is one consciously present oneself in the vicinity of one's moment?' not actually answered by Bellmer and Parmiggiani. It exists in their work as a reaction through their creativity. In Bellmer's case his obsession with his dolls, his repetition of themes with the same doll-objects, his reconstructing their bodies constitute a refusal to Bloch's 'as urgently as this can be felt, however, it always slips away again, the fluidity, darkness of the respective moment, just like this other thing that it means.' Bellmer's work is about implementing and preventing what slips away from slipping away via repetition and incompleteness. In many ways his doll-deformations, his doll-dismembering, his photographs of perverse scenarios of violence are a way of fixing fluidity, of struggling against the very violence that Parmiggiani calls 'l'éternité de l'éphémère'.⁴ To the individual pain seems eternal yet like

everything else it is fleeting and therefore unimportant even though it can destroy this individual – again this is unimportant since the individual's existence is also temporary. Yet Bellmer wants the world to know and feel the experience of violence on a more permanent basis. Bloch's the 'consciously present oneself in the vicinity of one's moment' is taken up by Bellmer in his work and frozen there: it becomes at a standstill. Bellmer seeks the impossible: to immortalise his experience through art, through his obsessive repetition of dolls. At the same time Bellmer does depict effects of experience in his dolls as a moment and in suspension. In this respect Bellmer must realise that an artist's consciousness, his experiencing is the voyage towards his work⁵; it is fixated presence in an object which is also a burning trace of his existence.⁶ In (no) time this burning trace that is the work will turn into smoke, spirit, memory that is forgetting and continue its voyage into oblivion – as Parmiggiani states. 'La vie d'un artiste est un voyage vers une œuvre et l'œuvre est un voyage dans l'oubli de la vie.'⁷

The experience of violence in Bellmer stems from his contact with a surrounding world that is often hostile, from his inner sensitivity and intense feelings that come together to form this '*darkness of experiencing in itself*'. Bellmer then writes this 'darkness of experiencing' into his art. His art, the dolls become transformed into very disturbing images seen as forms of violence on vulnerable figures. These images are always frozen and in suspension, halted from going on, or about to fall apart. Their state of suspension explains the effects of any experience of violence and the fragility of the individual confronted with this violence. Either the individual becomes psychologically paralysed and incapable of proceeding with the everyday; with life. Or the individual breaks down and falls apart. In addition the individual's perception of him/herself as perceived by others becomes alienated and deformed. This can be temporary or of a more permanent duration. Bellmer's repetition of his doll-constructions and photographs, his research into different forms of experience:

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138. Parmiggiani, *Le texte du temps*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, pp.236-27.
139. Adorno, *Correspondances: Adorno↔Benjamin 1928-1940*, p.156.
140. Benjamin, *L'Image proustienne*, in *Œuvres II*, p.136.
141. Parmiggiani, p.176.
142. Benjamin, *Franz Kafka*, pp.441-42. The quotation in brackets is from Franz Rosenzweig, *L'Étoile de la redemption*, trad. A. Derczanski et J.-L. Schlegel (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p.92.
143. *Ibid.*, pp. 441.
144. Parmiggiani, *Voyage dans l'oubli*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.243.
145. Benjamin, *Sur le pouvoir de l'imitation*, in *Œuvres II*, p.363.
146. Gianni Vattimo, *The Death or Decline of Art*, in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Clive Cazeaux (London: Routledge, 2000), p.190.
147. *Ibid.*, p.188.
148. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, pp.70-72.
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172. *Ibid.*, p.67.
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Adorno spoke of the traditional component in Schönberg's seemingly revolutionary music, and Benjamin considered tradition to be a part of an art work's aura. In his letter of October 22 [1942] Lowenthal referred to continuity as the 'criterion for love', an observation that followed on the heels of Horkheimer's assertion that mass culture deprived man of his *durée*. What should be understood [...] by tradition. [...] Tradition referred to the type of integrated experience the Institute members called *Erfahrung*, which was being destroyed by so-called 'progress'.⁹

This reference to tradition is doubly reinforced by Parmiggiani through the presence of a grand piano: the space of tradition embodying classical culture and harmonious creativity as part of the work. At the same time Parmiggiani exposes Zolla's book as the fragment that reflects the work's totality, as its *mise-en-abyme*. This fragmentation of a work; the dispersion of its totality into a fragment, as well as the breaking of continuity in the work through dissonant nonorganic elements transforms the knife piercing the ear into an ear stabbed by a knife. In other words, it transforms integrated experience into the flash experience: the lamentable *Erlebnis* that now takes over from *Erfahrung*. This shortens the *durée* of sensation making it superficial and does away with tradition as such. In the past, music, and other aesthetic experiences were heard and experienced as harmony, as a totality and more time was given for a profound experience to take place. (The pace of life was different, the distractions available were limited.) This metamorphosis of *Erfahrung* into *Erlebnis* is a form of violence done to the process of experiencing; to experience and is illustrated by Parmiggiani in *Che cos'è la tradizione*.

As Bloch explains above one imagines experiencing what is 'past or just appearing'. The past as thinking experience; as memory, and the 'just appearing' – here takes the form of disappearance (that is, what is just appearing is the disappearance of things, of existence) – are elements Parmiggiani engages with as objects in his work. One such example is *Che cos'è la tradizione*. At the same time Parmiggiani attempts to integrate 'what approaches [...] the dark

self' (Bloch above) which Parmiggiani calls 'les entrailles de l'homme'¹⁰ with "life" itself dissolving 'into the unreality of' the 'sum of its moments' (Bloch above). In other words, disappearance as what is 'just appearing' is also 'what approaches [...] the dark self'. This is what Parmiggiani communicates through his work which shows the unreality of life in its dissolution through time – whose span has shrunk considerably. (All of Parmiggiani's works chosen in chapter three illustrate this condition of the appearance of disappearance and dissolution.) This is supported by Parmiggiani's claim that artworks are nothing but traces of artists' burning existence; that man is blind or proceeds blindly;¹¹ that an artist travelling towards his work is none other than his/her voyage towards oblivion,¹² towards Kafka's 'pays de l'oubli'.¹³

And we ourselves simply do not occur merely as something remembered. Precisely: we live (*leben*) ourselves, but we do not 'experience' (*erleben*) ourselves; what meanwhile never became conscious can also not become unconscious. Insofar as we have never and nowhere become present through *ourselves*, neither within the just lived moment nor immediately afterward, we cannot appear as 'such' in any area of any memory.¹⁴

All artists, writers, thinkers, communicate existence as forms of experiencing and as some experience through their work. The artists and writers I have discussed here are certainly no exception to this. Hans Bellmer and Claudio Parmiggiani create works that communicate a '*darkness of experiencing*' and an experience of violence in very different forms to one another. (Again they are not exceptions.) Apart from my interest in both these artists, I have chosen them together because each one lives himself '*(leben)*' through his work in complete opposition to the other, and offer perfectly disparate examples of the writing of experience – of violence – in art. Bellmer desperately tries to experience the impossibility of experiencing '*(erleben)*' himself by constructing experiences through his work, by remembering. Bellmer's experiences are specific. These are the often thwarted erotic experience, the pain of desire as the consequences

of its unfulfillment that are reproduced as the effects of the experience of violence on the artificial body; on man's alter-ego or double.

Parmiggiani understands the impossibility of experiencing oneself, of the never becoming 'present through *ourselves*', of our blindness to ourselves (as well as to what surrounds us). The work Parmiggiani creates illustrates that the only possibility of coming near to this experiencing of the self is by raising consciousness, by becoming aware of the invisible using senses other than the eye, by thinking that is memory, by the hard process of remembering, by looking into one's 'entrailles'. Parmiggiani's objectives explored in his work are subversive, and express the experience of violence of our existence that is an eternal ephemerality. That is, Parmiggiani's work represents and embodies this inability to (durably) experience ourselves – as Bloch claims.

Notes

1. Erich Bloch, *The Shape of the Inconstruable Question*, in *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. from German by Anthony Nassar (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p.188.
2. Ibid., p.199.
3. Hans Bellmer, *Petite anatomie de l'inconscient physique ou l'anatomie de l'image* (Paris: Allia, 2002), p.78
4. 'Éternité de l'éphémère. Une œuvre qui aspire à l'immatériel, qui marque en utopie le dernier, extrême refuge de la pensée.' Parmiggiani on *Sculpture d'Ombre* quoted in Sylvain Amic, *Claudio Parmiggiani* (Montpellier: Actes Sud, 2003), p.28.
5. Parmiggiani, *Voyage dans l'oubli*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, édition bilingue, texte français établi par Anne et Michel Bresson-Lucas (Arles: Actes Sud, 2003), pp.241-43.
6. 'La vie d'un artiste est un voyage vers une œuvre', p.243.
7. 'Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait d'autre message à transmettre que la trace de notre passage brûlant, le signe de notre condition de comètes, rien d'autre à transmettre que notre solitude. Nous avançons comme des aveugles.' *Comme des aveugles*, in *ibid.*, p.197.
8. Parmiggiani, *Voyage dans l'oubli*, p.243.
9. Bloch, *The Shape of the Inconstruable Question*, p. 199.
10. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 1996), p.215.
11. Parmiggiani, *In Sogno: VIII*, in *Stella, Sangue, Spirito*, p.71.
12. Parmiggiani, *Comme des aveugles*, p.197.
13. Parmiggiani, *Voyage dans l'oubli*, p.243.
14. Walter Benjamin, *Franz Kafka*, in *Œuvres II*, trad. de l'allemand par Maurice de Gandillac, Rainer Rochlitz et Pierre Roche (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), p.250.
15. Bloch, *The Shape of the Inconstruable Question*, p.191.

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Über das Marionettentheater, 1962.

Über das Marionettentheater, 1962.





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de l'inconscient physique ou petite anatomie de l'image, 1957.





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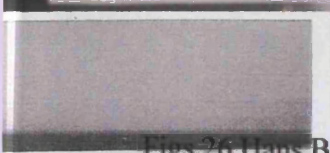
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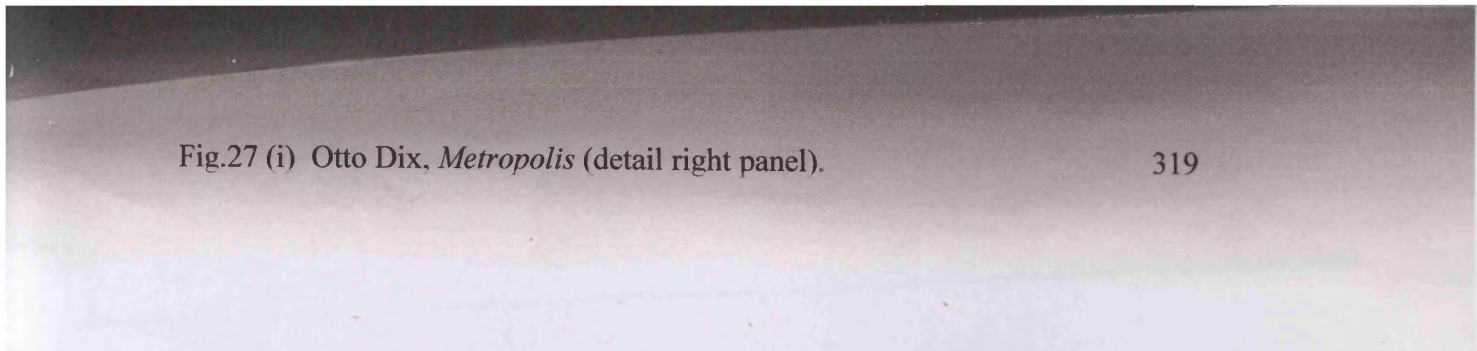
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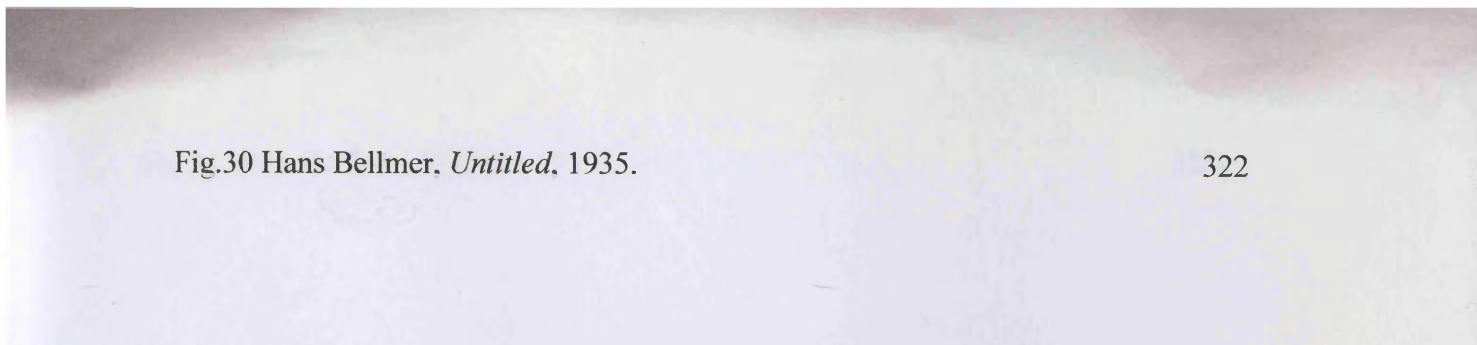




Fig.32 Claudio Parmiggiani, *La Grande Pietra*, 1983.

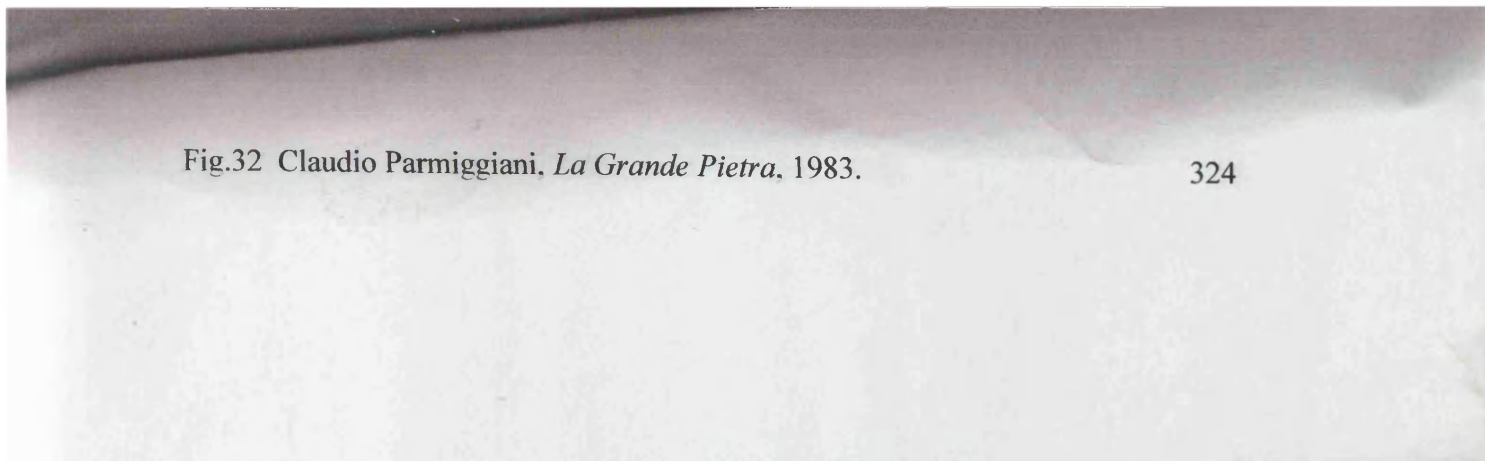


Fig.35 Claudio Parmiggiani, *Synecdoche*, 2002.

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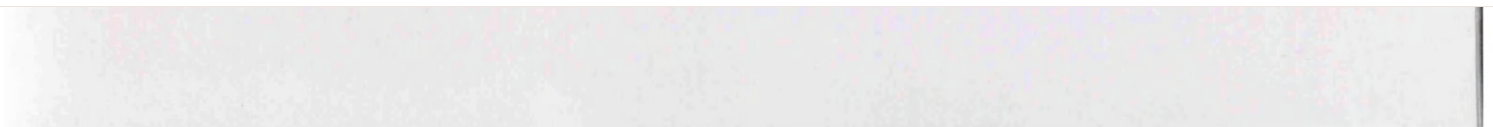
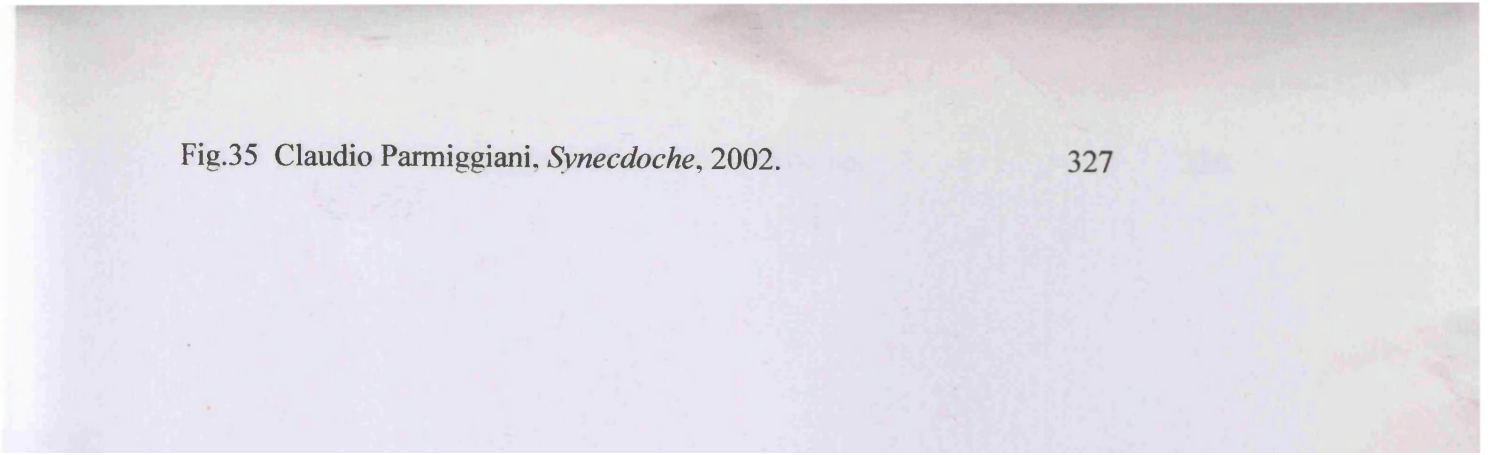


Fig.35 (i) Claudio Parmiggiani, *Synecdoche*, close up.







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